

**Soviet Art and the African Diaspora**

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## **Abstract**

Our students are living in an era of fraught political peril. The United States is galloping toward fascism, the Russia/Ukraine war is destabilizing Europe and Israel is currently enacting a genocide in Gaza. If Paulo Freire encourages us to “read the word and the world,” it is imperative that humanities teachers offer curricula requiring rigorous thinking and critical analysis. One of the most salient dimensions of the various conflicts, both nationally and globally, is the weaponization of propaganda and “cancel culture”. Consequently, this project will partially focus on the use of propaganda throughout Soviet relations with Africa and African-Americans. This unit will feature a range of Soviet-adjacent texts designed to both denigrate and uplift Black people, and ultimately examine the manner in which Cold War propaganda destroyed independence in the Congo.

## **Key Words**

Soviet Union, Post-Colonialism, The Cold War, Propaganda, Visual and Cinematic Art

## **Context: Postcolonial Teaching and Learning**

Thirty years in the School District of Philadelphia has convinced me that teaching and learning for social justice is a grassroots project. I believe that teachers work best when we collaborate with fellow educators and students to create classrooms that value students as makers of knowledge. Students are genuinely excited to learn when offered a curriculum that welcomes who they are and values their race, language, and identity. For me, this means developing politically conscious, culturally relevant curricula.

I currently teach 11th graders at George Washington Carver High School of Engineering and Science in Philadelphia. Carver HSES is a National Blue Ribbon School with a culturally and ethnically diverse population, 72% of whom come from low-income households. Many are either immigrants or children of immigrants. I most enjoy teaching writers like Chinua Achebe, August Wilson, and Toni Morrison, as well as filmmakers like Ousmane Sembene and Raoul Peck. Additionally, TIP has enabled me to study African music, Black Visual Culture. These artists systematically examine the lives of people who live the legacies of slavery and colonialism while also, like the great blues and jazz musicians, use their art to resist and transform the conditions that emerge from institutionalized oppression. They also examine gender, power and the inability of certain communities to establish generational wealth.

My capacity to teach postcolonial literature and film was informed by the teachings of Dr. Maureen Eke. When I attended *Writing Africa: Comparative Palavers and Perspectives* through the National Endowment for the Humanities in 2004, the seminar introduced me to many texts and topics that shaped my approach to teaching and learning. *Writing Africa* afforded me the opportunity to design and implement an elective course, “World Literature.” This class incorporated an interdisciplinary curriculum focusing on African history, literature and film. units included using excerpts from Adam Hoschschild’s *King Leopold’s Ghost* in conjunction with Raoul Peck’s biopic, *Lumumba* (2000). This was an important antidote to the World History textbook that dedicated at least forty pages to WWII and the Holocaust, but only four sentences to King Leopold’s colonization of the “Belgian Congo.” Thank you, Dr. Eke.

## **Jazz Pedagogy: Learning How to Listen**

Just as my interest in African and African-American literature and film would inform my current teaching practices, my love of jazz, discovered in college, would lay a vital role as well. I had the good fortune of living in Philadelphia at a time when there was a serious and significant revival of experimental jazz. I had started consuming this music while in college in New York and attending concerts when I moved back home to Philadelphia. There was an arts center in Philadelphia that held regular concerts of the most innovative musicians, most of whom were based in New York City. While I certainly knew how much I loved this music, I had no idea how much this music was preparing me to be both a student and a teacher.

Listening to jazz helped me understand the dialogical relationship between structure and improvisation as well as the generative value of listening. This awareness helped me formulate strategies for better listening, especially when students participating in classroom discussion suddenly broke into small ensembles, debating different aspects of the general discussion. Rather than submit to the conventional “one person at a time” format, I realized that these “improvised jam sessions” were equally vital. Similarly, jazz helped think more creatively about curriculum design. Jazz gave the freedom to improvise curriculum when it seemed right to do so. These improvisational moves frequently emerged from students’ response to what I planned. Therefore, jazz pedagogy is another way that teachers can learn from listening to students. Griffin et. al. (2023) are convincing in their assertion that jazz pedagogy offers praxis for any pedagogy committed to asking the question, in the spirit of Marvin Gaye, “What’s Goin’ On?”

Griffin et. al. in *Towards a Jazz Pedagogy: Learning with and from Jazz Greats and Great Educators* maintain, “Given its distinct history as a form of resistance against racist oppression, the work of jazz, and all Black music, is and has always been resistance (Griffin et. al. 2023, p 410).” This concept embraces the justification for studying, however briefly, the Israel/Palestine war, which, of course, remains divisive politically, in the media, on college campuses and in other public spaces. Keep in mind that Griffin et. al. make us aware that jazz pedagogy “recognize[s] the implications and possibilities of improvisation and allow students to draw on their own style and knowledge to create something all *their* own” (Griffin et. al. 2023, p. 411).”

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## **Roots: Structured Improvisation as Dialogical Pedagogy**

The purpose of investigating relations between the Soviets and the African diaspora is to help students gain a deeper understanding how one of the world’s most transformative revolutions shaped both decolonization in Africa and civil rights movements in the United States. I believe learning about such events helps cultivate critical literacy skills required in a time of great national and global turmoil. This is especially important because, in my personal experience with students over the past few years, students are politically disengaged and absorb much of their information through social media algorithms. Consequently, I would like to share a moment when I collaborated with students in another moment of social and political upheaval.

The first half of the 2016-17 school year was dedicated to teaching *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison and *I Am Not Your Negro*, Raoul Peck's documentary film based on unpublished writing by James Baldwin. Both texts explore the existential experiences faced by African-Americans while living in a white supremacist society. These texts seemed particularly relevant considering the racist tenor of Donald Trump's presidential campaign, as well his tolerance of the racist mobs in Charlottesville. Fueled by classroom discourse around the texts, and an inescapable fear of how Trump's presidency would impact my students. Our rich discussions inspired me to collaborate with students in order to demonstrate what can happen when adolescents study texts that examine the consequences of white supremacy in the United States. The following article was published in the now-defunct *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*:

*This commentary is written by Daisha Bagley, Dillon Dang, Raquel Fredette, Saniyah Jenkins, Joshua Kouassi, Tiffany Roberts, Amy Snodgrass and Geoffrey Winikur.*

### **I Am Not Your Pedagogy of Violence; Or, A College Recommendation Letter**

Our students are growing up in a time when it is quite evident that the past is present. Still teenagers, they know that they are loathed by those occupying seats of power in Washington, D.C. They know that the President [thinks his own daughter is "a piece of ass."](#) They know that the same individual was elected despite the fact that he sexually assaulted numerous women. They know that Donald Trump thinks that [some White Nationalists are "fine people."](#) They know that the President [thinks](#) that an NFL player who kneels at the anthem is a "son-of-a-bitch." They know that Trump and his conservative white base would rather elect a pedophile than a Democrat to the United States Senate. They know that racism, misogyny and xenophobia are so entrenched in American soil that its citizens are willing to elect a criminal so long as he makes America great again. They can only imagine what he thinks of them. And they know this before they are even old enough to graduate high school or vote--every day they may be taught, consciously and unconsciously, by the media and images emanating from the White House and onto their screens.

Consequently, this year has compelled me to engage in reading and writing with students in ways that are flipping the script. The writers featured here represent a fraction of their peers for whom Obama-reality has been turned upside down.

Our students are living amid a serious pedagogical problem requiring solutions, the most obvious of which is that they need texts that transcend the present moment by offering detailed analysis of how we arrived. While there are many suitable resources, I chose Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Raoul Peck's *I am Not Your Negro*, a film based on *Remember This House* by James Baldwin. Such texts require a method of teaching that is deeply informed by learning with and from students. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* has achieved canonical status, yet is probably not widely read in high school. However inscrutable, it is an unflinching mirror. The Haitian film director, Raoul Peck, has given this country a gift by reinscribing the lives and work of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. into our national memory. Ellison imagined a story speaking the past that will always be present. In my class, thanks to Emily, we sometimes call the narrator "Imaginary Man."

Ellison, Baldwin and Peck all possess the art of juxtaposing history, imagery and sound in ways that can make the reader question the ground s/he stands on.

It is common for students of color, when discussing race and other complex issues, to qualify their remarks by saying things like, “No offense, but....” Early in our viewing of *I Am Not Your Negro*, students were routinely offering such qualifications. I, taking the teacher stance, encouraged students to stop apologizing before bearing witness to racism. I said something like, “You’ll be going to college soon. You may have white friends and you can educate them without apology.” I reminded them that much can be learned from any discomfort that may surface when discussing race across racial lines. Students insisted that that is not possible, and I genuinely did not understand their arguments. That night, in a journal, Tiffany set me straight. Building on Buddy Guy lyrics included in the film (I can’t win/’Cause I don’t have/a thing to lose) Tiffany claimed:

[*I Am Not Your Negro*] compares pictures from the civil rights era to the pictures of today, people protesting Police brutality and the only difference is that the pictures today are in color. Back-tracking isn’t a new thing in the black community. We were stolen from our homes in Africa and sold into slavery. If and when we escaped our masters, they made laws for people to hunt us down like animals and return us to our owners, as if we don’t bleed the same blood, as if we aren’t all a part of the human race. “I can’t win” means we can’t get fair treatment. “I can’t win” means we won’t be valued the same as whites. “I can’t win” means we have to watch what we say in front of whites because we fear for our lives. The African American race is an endangered species. It is ingrained in our brains to show respect to the white man, even if we don’t realize, by softening the truth to make it easier to hear, making it more bearable, making it so that we don’t blame the whites for how unjustly they treated and continue to treat us. “WE CAN’T WIN!”

Who can argue with that!

### **John Kelly’s and Donald Trump’s Pedagogy of Violence**

Tiffany’s pessimism makes sense when contrasted with two recent events emanating from the White House. The first was perpetrated by General John Kelly, the President’s chief of staff. When Tiffany addressed the existential stasis that many Americans feel and experience, Daisha identifies the foundation buttressing the white supremacy entwined in both Kelly’s and Trump’s narratives. There is a scene in *I Am Not Your Negro* showing a [white person holding a sign](#) that says, “Who needs niggers?” It is quite obvious that Trump and Kelly do, though their n-words needn’t necessarily be a person of African descent. Immigrants, Muslims, gays, transgender people, women and victims of pedophilia and sexual assault will do just as well. Kelly’s revisionist comments about Robert E. Lee and the Civil War, as well as Trump’s iconographic use of Jackson, stand in stark contrast to Daisha’s analysis of a scene from the film:

“Who needs niggers?,” says a sign displayed at a white supremacist rally. This country needs “niggers”. Although I do not like to use this term, I think it is mandatory in this context. It is ironic, how a white person could display a sign saying such a thing when African Americans, were wrongfully seized from their homeland by Europeans because they **needed** them. Slaves were responsible for helping to maintain and upkeep the early colonies of which resulted in tremendous economic growth for the country. Later, paving the way for America to be known as one of the most self-sustaining countries in the entire world. Keeping in mind that the success of this country probably would not have been possible without slaves being as though they have

made monumental impacts, not only through hard labor but also morally and philosophically. The basis of this country was built by slaves, because the Europeans **needed** them. So if anyone is wondering who needs “niggers” anyway?, America needed and still does need “niggers” in every way.

Daisha’s actualized reading stands on its own. The reality is that she will always wonder who is waving the “who needs ...” sign at her, given that white supremacy needs an object of hate.

Meanwhile, Joshua, a man who knows a lot about history, and therefore understands that Trump and Kelly are just a part of the white supremacist continuum, suggests:

Studying Ellison and Baldwin in Trump's America is a sort of refuge from the ongoing storm happening all over the world. It shows us that there are voices of reason which can be trusted, rather than the senseless babblings we get from our nation’s capital. Ellison and Baldwin are like Sherlock and Watson respectively. Ellison, being born into a generation still fresh in the aftermath of slavery, he had a vision of what America should be but also what it was in essence. Because of this, he was able to write his own truth about what he thought should be and these ideas were so intricate that others adopted this as their truth as well.

The difference between Ellison/Baldwin and Kelly/Trump is that the former were willing to die in order to not be targets of institutionalized white supremacy, while the latter pair hearken back to times when white men lynched and raped in order to assert their absolute power.

Saniyah, shrewd, furthers the argument:

Studying Ellison and Baldwin in Trump’s America is very eye-opening, especially being an African American female. Throughout Trump’s presidency I was shown things that I would’ve never imagined the leader of the free world to do. And because his actions are being justified and tolerated is even more shocking. I am able to actually see the power of white supremacy in the United States. A place where a black man can get killed during a traffic stop but people look the other way when our “president” mocks and openly engages in sexual abuse. A place where terrorists can lead a violent protest injuring several innocent citizens but are still looked at as being good people. Studying Ellison and Baldwin in Trump’s America has assured me that the country I am being raised in has enabled a strategic system for me to fail.

Amy believes that such misogyny goes hand-in-hand with Trump’s vision of white supremacy:

These are the type of people who have power in our country, people who treat women and people of color as objects and animals - “You’re disgusting” says Donald Trump to a breastfeeding mother, or we can’t forget about when he openly allowed Howard Stern to call his daughter a “piece of ass” - and joked about dating her on national television, “Yeah, she’s really something, and what a beauty, that one. If I weren’t happily married and, ya know, her father...” However, Ralph Ellison and so far James Baldwin have only shed light on black people in America- which is also shown little respect in the eyes of Trump or just the government in general. Ellison and Baldwin fight for their rights, which is shown in their artworks- but someone similar to Trump wouldn’t even realize how hard it is for people like Ellison and Baldwin to earn the same rights others were born with.

**An Answer:**

Saniyah::

Martin and Malcolm are two black men fighting the same battle but with two totally different strategies. Martin Luther King ultimately wanted whites and blacks to be able to coexist with each other in several different public settings. He fought heavily for desegregation and equal rights for African Americans. MLK was also a strong advocate for nonviolence. King often supported and/ or taught classes to blacks on how to impassively deal with whites when they would terrorize them. Malcolm on the other hand was the exact opposite of MLK. X wanted nothing to do with white people and believed that they were devils. He believed that blacks and whites had too much negative history to even consider coexisting with each other. Unlike MLK's nonviolent views Malcolm did support violence to an extent. He strongly believed that when someone initiates violence with you it is your job to retaliate against them. Malcolm's words were often misconstrued to portray him as being an advocate for initiating violence against whites. Although both men have several differences they both share the same genuine goal in receiving justice for their race. This goal was driven by their strong belief in their religious faiths. For MLK his faith was Christianity which is the reason that he is so willing to embrace whites with open arms. As for Malcolm he followed the Muslim faith, which drive his strict policies. Both men asserted their legendary practices, speeches and ideas into reshaping the dynamic of race relations in America. Without the help of these two heroic men the U.S would still have it's blatant segregation rules and practices that followed the abolition of slavery.

John Kelly commanded forces that helped quell the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, and apparently has never forgotten what he thought he learned there. In other words, he, unlike Malcolm and Martin, has only fought for the preservation of empire.

Raquel offers this perspective:

*"By the time each met his death, there was practically no difference between them."*

Baldwin believed that although Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. had started out from contrasting backgrounds, they slowly grew more similar as their paths intertwined. I think it's almost impossible for two men to want the exact same goal and not at least be similar on more than one different level. Certainly the two had a different idea of how to fix racial injustice, and their religious and family backgrounds had set them on two different paths. However, their similarities are not only more abundant, but also more significant. For example, though Malcolm encouraged violence as self defense and Martin urged his followers to "turn the other cheek", or protest non-violently, both could agree that the white man obviously needed to be fought in one way or another. Even many of their methods were the same. Both used their religions to fight against whites and bring black people together. And finally, they had similar endings in that they were fatally shot. Neither of these men could have died peacefully with the burden of other's hatred and jealousy to carry on their shoulders.

Our children are experiencing the consequences of history and hopefully carry this knowledge forward as they navigate the aftermath.

According to the [New York Times](#), John Kelly said:

...when I was a kid growing up, a lot of things were sacred in our country. Women were sacred, looked upon with great honor. That's obviously not the case anymore as we see from recent cases. Life -- the dignity of life -- is sacred. That's gone. Religion, that seems to be gone as well.

This is really something from a guy who's boss hates women, called for the death penalty for the wrongly accused Central Park 5 and aligns himself with a politician who thinks slavery was good for black families. Young Kelly was old enough to witness police-state brutality in the Jim Crow South, so while his lies are transparent, it is important to remember their real purpose is to remind his base that erasing history is essential to preserving their own privilege and imaginary power. What they might not know is that this generation may one day become a formidable foe.

The political opinions expressed are entirely my own. Whether my students agree or disagree is immaterial. The reason we share authorship of this commentary is that they pushed me to further understand how reading their words and lives transforms my own understanding of texts that I know well. I have learned to respect their minds as much as I do my own; their words and ideas are as much a part of this commentary as are mine. I must be willing to take risks and withstand strong challenges when I am wrong. I can help them learn certain skills, but that's all. In turn, they teach me how to read the texts for real. I am genuinely afraid of the country that our students are growing up in, and so it seems that we have to learn to love each other in a way, as defined by King, when the love is "something strong and that organizes itself into something powerful, a direct action."

Dillon has the last word:

Studying Ellison and Baldwin in Trump's America is a requirement in order to survive this tyranny for the next four (or maybe even less) years. As a minority, I feel as though it is your duty to learn and study history about your own race or about other minorities. Studying history will present you with facts and ideologies that had existed in the past. Many of these ideologies have led to the genocide of certain groups of people. By studying Ellison and Baldwin, you are exposed to people that "used their dreadful journey to instruct the people they love so much." (Baldwin). Learning about people like that can give relief and inspire people that are being oppressed. By acknowledging the past, you realize that some tragic events that have happened, like police brutality, unfair justice system, genocide, segregation, etc, are still being presented, and if not being presented more than ever due to a recent election. Living in a country run by whites, you have to be aware of different views, other than the ones that are in power (whites). A good example of that would be how Ellison writes about how students in the HBCU were being brainwashed and used for the benefits of whites. Students are living in a society where the people on top get to decide what they can and cannot learn (about history). I feel as though reading Ellison or Baldwin can fill in the gaps that had been missed from the teachings of the school system. By doing so, one will truly understand what Trump has planned for this country and the people living in it.

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## Content Objectives

Our students are living in a moment when the United States' foreign policy is explicitly aligned with the global interests of Putin's Russia. Most students are probably unaware of the implications of this transformation, so it will be useful if they can discover at least one significant dimension in Soviet/Western relations: the Soviet's contradictory relationship with both Africa and African-Americans.

This unit will examine the trajectory of the Soviet connection to parts of the African diaspora. Students will learn about how the Soviets propagated traditional racist attitudes toward Africa, while also cultivating anti-racist ideology in the interest of global revolution. The main unit of study will focus on the assassination of the Congolese Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, which occurred only six months after the Congo gained independence from Belgium. This unit will feature the Raul Peck's biopic, *Lumumba*.

## Phase I: Soviet/Africa Research Assignment and Presentation

[Cornell Note Taking — The Best Way To Take Notes, Explained | Goodnotes Blog](#)

### I. Wayland Rudd

Wayland Rudd was an African-American actor who travelled to the Soviet Union in order to appear in a play (Mack, 2018). He also served as a model for Soviet art depicting the Black struggle. Each group member will select a different text. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes. Students will have two class periods to review content and compose Cornell Notes.

[Cornell Note Taking — The Best Way To Take Notes, Explained | Goodnotes Blog](#)

I will share images from *The Wayland Rudd Collection: Exploring Racial Imaginaries in Soviet Visual Culture*. Ed. Yevgeniy Fiks, Denise Milstein, and Matvei Yankelevich. New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2021. xlviii, 216 pp. Bibliography. Illustrations. Plates. \$40.00, hard bound.

[The Wayland Rudd Collection: Exploring Racial Imaginaries in Soviet Visual Culture](#)

[Wayland Rudd \(1900-1952\) | BlackPast.org](#)

[The Wayland Rudd Collection - The Brooklyn Rail](#)

## Choice Board Option A: Powerpoint

Group creates a powerpoint detailing the life and art of Wayland Rudd. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes. Students will have two class periods to review content and compose Cornell Notes.

Required components:

- A brief biography of Rudd
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why Rudd is innovative
- The slideshow should be 15 slides.
- A slideshow that has a title does not count as one of the 20 slides.
- Each slide should include an image and written text.
- Sources must be cited.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.
- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.
- Be prepared to take questions at the end of your presentation.

### **Choice Board Option B: Podcast**

Students will compose a script based on the life and historical significance of Wayland Rudd. This script will be recorded as a podcast. Podcasts should be 10-15 minutes long. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes.

Required components:

- A brief biography of Rudd
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why Rudd is innovative
- Sources must be cited.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.
- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.

### **Choice Board Option C: Video**

Students will compose a script based on the life and historical significance of Wayland Rudd. This script will be recorded as a video. Videos should be 10-15 minutes long. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes.

- A brief biography of Rudd
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why Rudd is innovative

- Sources must be cited.
- Students should wear appropriate costumes.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.
- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.

### **Choice Board Option D: Canva**

Group creates a slideshow detailing the life and art of Wayland Rudd. Canva should be 15 -20 pages in length. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes.

- A brief biography of Rudd
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why Rudd is innovative
- Sources must be cited.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.
- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.

Groups may propose another project design.

## **II. Soviet Art and Decolonization**

Students will review art depicting the African decolonization moment. This will expose students to some of the ways in which Soviet art promoted African independence. Each group member will select a different text. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes. Students will have two class periods to review content and compose Cornell Notes.

[Cornell Note Taking — The Best Way To Take Notes, Explained | Goodnotes Blog](#)

<https://mltoday.com/africa-is-fighting-africa-will-win-how-soviet-art-supported-decolonization/>

<https://artmargins.com/vision-and-communism/>

<https://www.new-east-archive.org/features/show/5323/red-africa-yevgeniy-fiks-history-soviet-relations-africa-art-ideology>

[Constructions of Africa in Early Soviet Children's Literature - AAIHS](#)

### **Choice Board Option A: Power Point**

Group creates a slideshow detailing the role of Soviet art in promoting African decolonization. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes.

Required components:

- A brief retrospective on the role of Soviet art in promoting African decolonization.
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why this Soviet art is innovative
- The slideshow should be 15 slides.
- A slideshow that has a title does not count as one of the 20 slides.
- Each slide should include an image and written text.
- Sources must be cited.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.
- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.
- Be prepared to take questions at the end of your presentation.

### **Choice Board Option B: Podcast**

Students will compose a script detailing the role of Soviet art in promoting African decolonization. This script will be recorded as a podcast. Podcasts should be 10-15 minutes long. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes.

Required components:

- A brief review of the role of Soviet art in promoting African decolonization.
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why this Soviet art is innovative
- Sources must be cited.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.
- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.

### **Choice Board Option C: Video**

Students brief review of the role of Soviet art in promoting African decolonization. This script will be recorded as a video. Videos should be 10-15 minutes long. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes.

- A brief review of the role of Soviet art in promoting African decolonization.
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why his Soviet art is innovative

- Sources must be cited.
- Students should wear appropriate costumes.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.
- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.

### **Choice Board Option D: Canva**

Group creates a Canva detailing the role of Soviet art in promoting African decolonization. Canva should be 15-20 pages in length. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes.

- A presentation detailing the role of Soviet art in promoting African decolonization.
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why this Soviet art is innovative
- Sources must be cited.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.
- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.

### **III. Soviets and African-Americans**

Students will review the various ways in which Soviets and members of the African diaspora forged alliances. Each group member will select a different text. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes. Students will have two class periods to review content and compose Cornell Notes.

[Cornell Note Taking — The Best Way To Take Notes, Explained | Goodnotes Blog](#)

<https://www.aaihs.org/black-october-an-introduction/>

<https://www.aaihs.org/the-russian-revolution-africa-and-the-diaspora/>

[Langston Hughes' Visit to the Soviet Union \(1932-1933\) | BlackPast.org](#)

[Opinion | When the Harlem Renaissance Went to Communist Moscow - The New York Times](#)

[Richard Wright: I Tried to Be a Communist - The Atlantic](#)

The following Hughes texts will be exported from Canvas:

[Langston Hughes, “Now across the water in Russia...” in \*The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes\*, Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, eds. \(New York: Vintage, 1994\), 177.](#)

Langston Hughes, "Moscow and Me," *International Literature* 3 (1933): 60-65.

Langston Hughes, "Negroes in Moscow: In a Land Where There Is No Jim Crow," *International Literature* 4 (1933): 78-81.

### **Choice Board Option A: Power Point**

Group creates a slideshow detailing the relationship between the Soviets and artists and intellectuals of the African Diaspora. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes.

Required components:

- A brief retrospective detailing the relationship between the Soviets and artists and intellectuals of the African Diaspora.
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why this literature is significant
- The slideshow should be 15 slides.
- A slideshow that has a title does not count as one of the 20 slides.
- Each slide should include an image and written text.
- Sources must be cited.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.
- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.
- Be prepared to take questions at the end of your presentation.

### **Choice Board Option B: Podcast:**

Students will compose a script detailing the relationship between the Soviets and artists and intellectuals of the African Diaspora. This script will be recorded as a podcast. Podcasts should be 10-15 minutes long. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes.

Required components:

- A brief review of the role of Soviet art in promoting African decolonization.
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why this literature is significant
- Sources must be cited.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.

- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.

### **Choice Board Option C: Video**

Students brief review detailing the relationship between the Soviets and artists and intellectuals of the African Diaspora. This script will be recorded as a video. Videos should be 10-15 minutes long. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes.

- A brief review of the role of Soviet art in promoting African decolonization.
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why this literature is significant
- Sources must be cited.
- Students should wear appropriate costumes.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.
- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.

### **Choice Board Option D: Canva**

Group creates a Canva detailing the relationship between the Soviets and artists and intellectuals of the African Diaspora. Canva should be 15-20 pages in length. Student critique and analysis will be guided by data yielded from their Cornell Notes.

- A presentation detailing the role of Soviet art in promoting African decolonization.
- A critical perspective based on cited scholarly evaluations
- Analysis of why this literature is significant
- Sources must be cited.
- Individuals in the group should divide the labor evenly.
- The presentation should be rehearsed ahead of time.
- The final presentations may be presented to different grades/ classes.

**Groups may propose another project design. Presentations will occur over three class periods.**

## **IV. *Lumumba***

After the presentations detailed above, we will begin an inquiry into the murky Soviet role in the Congolese independence movement circa 1959-1960. The ultimate focus of this section will be centered around Raoul Peck's masterful biopic, *Lumumba*. Raul Peck is one of his generation's most important filmmakers. His oeuvre includes biopics such as *Lumumba* and *The Young Karl Marx*. *Sometimes in April* is a drama focusing on the 1994 Rwanda genocide. His most famous documentary, *I Am Not Your Negro*, is an inquiry into the life and words of James Baldwin. As

Saint-Just and Pressley- Shannon (2015) put it: “Peck has used the film medium to decenter hegemonic discourses and to preserve memory through larger historical narratives of personal stories (pg. 3).” Consequently, studying *Lumumba* will offer interesting insight into the impact of the Cold War on the independence movement in the Congo. It is also worth noting that Patrice Lumumba has surged to relevance due to the recent release of the Academy Award nominated documentary, *Soundtrack to a Coup D'état*.

## **Body Biography Directions**

The Body Biography is a project designed to help students create a visual portrait of an important character in a fictional and/or historical text. In this instance groups will create a Body Biography of the Congolese independence leader, Patrice Lumumba.

### **Step I - Research**

Each group member will select one of the following sources:

[Raoul Peck's movie "Lumumba" a discussion by D'Lynn Waldron](#)

[On Lumumba: Death of a Prophet \(1991\) & the Ongoing Genocide in Congo](#)

[Raoul Peck: "Baldwin and Marx – Same Struggle?"](#)

[‘Lumumba: Death of a Prophet’: Revisiting a Mythic Figure - The New York Times](#)

[Raoul Peck’s Lumumba: History or Hagiography](#)

[The Congo, Decolonization, and the Cold War, 1960–1965](#)

[The Lumumba Plot: The Secret History of the CIA and a Cold War Assassination | CSIS Events](#)

Document at least FIVE important facts and reflections on a Cornell Notes sheet. Share information with your peers.

### **Step II - Body Biography Draft**

(I will share a model.)

Your job is to create a visual portrait of Patrice Lumumba. Rather than use actual body parts you will select symbols that represent various body parts of an individual. These are the parts you should include in your portrait:

- a. Head
- b. Eyes
- c. Nose
- d. Ears



- e. Neck
- f. Arms
- g. Hands
- h. Legs
- i. Feet
- j. Heart
- k. Lungs

### **Step III - Final Copy**

Draw your final copy on a piece of large chart paper.

### **Step IV - Mandatory Presentation**

#### **Phase Two: *Lumumba* Analytical Essay**

Following Body Biography presentations we will watch Raoul Peck's biopic, *Lumumba* (2000) about the political career of the first Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Patrice Lumumba. He was elected in June of 1960 and assassinated in 1961. His murder was authorized by the Belgian government with the consent of the United States. Lumumba is often revered for his willingness to defy the West, and his current relevance is substantiated by Peck's film as well as the recent documentary *Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat* (2024). Students will complete nightly analytical response journals as we watch this film. The journals will serve as draft paragraphs for their final essay

Your job is to compose an essay analyzing the manner in which foreign interests ultimately undermined Patrice Lumumba's desire to establish an independent, self-governing nation. This can include Mobutu's collaboration with Belgium, Belgium's alliance with the United States and Soviet efforts to collude. You may use data derived from the Body Biography source bank, your analytical response journals, and must include information presented in the film, *Lumumba*.

Essay Outline: [Lumumba Essay](#)

Sentence Starters [Soviet Tip Sentence Starters](#)

**This essay will be completed at home. Students will have 5 days to complete a draft followed by two days of peer-conferences and the final draft will be submitted 3 days later.**

#### **V - *Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat***

The final phase will be more casual. We will view the recent documentary *Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat*. This film examines the role that American jazz played in both promoting the interests of

the United States, as well as in efforts to spur decolonization in Africa. This film includes vitage archival footage of many of the key players involved in Soviet/African relations.

After viewing the film students will compose a “Soundtrack for Our Times.” Each student will select 10 songs that reflect our current times. Make a list of titles, artists and one sentence explanation of why the song is relevant.

## Rubrics

[Collaboration Rubric](#)

[Copy of Rubric for group presentations](#)

- Thanks to my colleague, [Rena Curless](#) for sharing these rubrics

## Appendix

### Pennsylvania ELA Standards

#### 1.2 Reading Informational Text

**Students read, understand, and respond to informational text—with an emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.**

**CC.1.2.11–12.C** Analyze the interaction and development of a complex set of ideas, sequence of events, or specific individuals over the course of the text.

**CC.1.2.11–12.D** Evaluate how an author’s point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

**CC.1.2.11–12.E** Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

**CC.1.2.11–12.F** Evaluate how words and phrases shape meaning and tone in texts.

**CC.1.2.11–12.G** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

## **1.4 Writing**

**Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.**

**CC.1.4.11–12.A** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately.

**CC.1.4.11–12.B** Write with a sharp, distinct focus identifying topic, task, and audience.

**CC.1.4.11–12.D** Organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a whole; use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text; provide a concluding statement or section that supports the information presented; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension.

**CC.1.4.11–12.M** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events.

**CC.1.4.11–12.N** Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple points of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters.

**CC.1.4.11–12.O** Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, reflection, multiple plotlines, and pacing to develop experiences, events, and/or characters; use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.

**CC.1.4.11–12.R** Demonstrate a grade-appropriate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

**CC.1.2.11–12.A** Determine and analyze the relationship between two or more central ideas of a text, including the development and interaction of the central ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

**CC.1.2.11–12.B** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and conclusions based on and related to an author's implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.

**CC.1.2.11–12.I** Analyze foundational U.S. and world documents of historical, political, and literary significance for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.

**CC.1.2.11–12.J** Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college- and career-readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

## **National Standards for Visual Art Education**

**Content Standard #4:** Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Achievement Standard: • Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures • Students identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places • Students demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art

**Content Standard #5:** Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others Achievement Standard: • Students understand there are various purposes for creating works of visual art • Students describe how people's experiences influence the development of specific artworks • Students understand there are different responses to specific artworks

**Content Standard #6:** Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Achievement Standard: • Students understand and use similarities and differences between characteristics of the visual arts and other arts disciplines • Students identify connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum

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