



The Harlem Renaissance Births a Black Culture

Curriculum Unit 00.04.04
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The Purpose of the Unit

This curriculum, *The Harlem Renaissance Births a Black Culture* , has several objectives:

- first, to give students the opportunity to explore the diamond mine that history calls the Harlem Renaissance, and to discover the men and women who labored to cut and polish what were to become its precious gems.
- second, to create a learning environment where African American students can identify with their rich cultural heritage that is largely unknown to them, and for that matter unknown to all of the students in our program.
- third, to give students the opportunity for hands-on experiences reproducing visual art from the Renaissance and creating their own visual art by interpreting Renaissance poetry.
- fourth, to explore with the students the events in the early 1900's in this country that made Harlem fertile ground for the growth of the Renaissance.
- fifth, to enhance the students' computer and Internet skills.
- sixth, to create many opportunities for students to practice Language Arts CAPT skills, identifying these for students as they occur.
- finally, to create many opportunities for student-collaboration through art, research presentations, and a culminating school celebration.

Introduction

In five years of teaching English to at-risk high school students of color at the Wilbur Cross Annex, whose reading, critical thinking, speaking and writing skills are desperately wanting, I have found that hands-on art activities greatly reduce stress, boredom, and the typical student resistance to practicing these important skills. Art activities are also effective memory holders for concepts and content in a curriculum. Art activities provide the opportunity for teamwork and collaboration, and give students an alternative way of demonstrating what they have learned. And I have found that the inclusion of art activities in the curriculum makes the students more willing to practice the type of activities found in the Language Arts section of the CAPT. It all seems to feel less like work to the students. Finally, there is the added bonus that many students ultimately take great pride in their artwork, and, mounted on the wall, it becomes a manifestation of them. I have watched the spark of an art project leap from student to student at a table. I now incorporate art into as many English units as I possibly can; thinking of ways to do this has become second nature for me when designing units.

Cultural Identity

What richer cultural phenomenon than the Harlem Renaissance, with its surfeit of art, literature, music, dance, politics and business, is there for this type of unit infused with art activities? At the same time, studying the Renaissance allows our large Black population the opportunity to immerse itself in a cultural identity through the humanities that is the cornerstone of Black culture in this country. When I surveyed the students in my classes, only a tiny percentage had ever heard of the Harlem Renaissance, and none of them really knew what it was.

Logistics of Teaching this Unit

This unit is designed for 90-minute daily classes and may be team-taught or taught by one teacher. In our program, I am planning to team-teach this unit with an English teacher, but it could be taught with a social studies teacher, or, for that matter, an art teacher. Because of the art projects and the field trip to Harlem, it will be more manageable to team-teach this unit.

Major Art Activities: Cosmogram and Mural

The unit I am designing around the Harlem Renaissance will have two large art projects: first, a reproduction of the cosmogram titled “Rivers,” designed by Houston Conwill, on the lobby floor of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, in honor of Langston Hughes and Arturo Schomburg. “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” the first poem Langston Hughes ever published, is embedded in brass in this brilliant red and blue mosaic which measures approximately fifteen feet in diameter. And, indeed, the blue mosaic rivers flow out from its nucleus, across the lobby floor. Buried under this nucleus are the remains of the poet, himself. Students will use paint to reproduce the cosmogram and will hang it on the wall of our classroom as a symbol of our unit; or because our halls are spacious and the floors are painted, the students may reproduce the cosmogram by painting it on the floor in the hall, as a permanent symbol of our unit and as part of the décor for our culminating activity, “Harlem Renaissance Night” celebration.

The second major art project is a class mural that will stretch the length of one side of the classroom. This mural will grow as the class researches: on the internet (there is a list of web sites at the end of the unit), at the New Haven Library, and in videos and CD’s, the people, places, poetry, art, music, dance, and photographs, such as the march on February 17, 1919, up Fifth Avenue, by the 369th Infantry Regiment (a.k.a. Harlem Hell Fighters, 1,300 strong) all of whom were decorated by the French government with the Cross of War, at the end of WW I. This mural titled, “Soul of Harlem,” will develop a soul of its own as students find and create materials to mount, and as the unit progresses.

To introduce the cosmogram that the students will reproduce and to present an overview of the Harlem Renaissance, I will begin by showing the two-hour video titled *A Walk Through Harlem* that was produced by Public Broadcasting System in 1999. This walking tour hosted by David Hartmann and Barry Lewis, the historian and architect presents the history of Harlem, right through the Renaissance, and up to the present. The video is rich in art, architecture, and photographic images of the Renaissance. Hartmann and Lewis pay a visit to the Schomburg Center and stand on the cosmogram in the lobby where Professor Kate Russian

explains the inception of the cosmogram, shows us the imbedded poem, and reads it aloud. This video, combined with photographs I have taken of the cosmogram, should give the students a clear model from which to work on reproducing this dramatic piece of art. It will be necessary for a small group of students to make a small scale drawing of the cosmogram. Then, it will need to be enlarged into sections and reproduced on three-foot wide roles of white paper. One group of students will need to reproduce letters for the poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," that will be overlaid onto the cosmogram. This could be done with stencils or computers. If students are going to reproduce the cosmogram on the floor, they will have to figure out how they are going to achieve this. In either case, planning and measuring will be crucial to the task.

A group of students may be responsible for reproducing the symbols that appear in the cosmogram, or one person per group will take responsibility for reproducing the symbols in its section of the cosmogram.

Langston Hughes: Poet Laureate of Black America

This video A Walk Through Harlem also is an effective way to introduce Langston Hughes and subsequently, his poetry, beginning with "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," a short but poignant piece identifying the soul of the black man or woman at one with the timeless rivers of life. Hughes is said to have written this poem on the back of an envelope while crossing the Mississippi by train.¹ Hughes's poetry is wide-ranging, both lyrical and political; it embodies the voices of ordinary black folks he intended for his main audience. It expresses both a cultural identity and political protest. At a time when the Renaissance was laying the foundation for what was to be the highly visible black culture, Langston Hughes composed over 800 poems. It is no wonder he is sometimes referred to as the poet laureate of black America.

I have chosen a cross section of Hughes's poems, representative of his style and diversity. "Harlem Night Song," lyrical and inviting, begins by wooing the reader to:

Come
Let us roam the night together
Singing.

I love you.
Across
The Harlem rooftops
Moon is shining. . .

(Harlem Night Song," 1-7)

"Negro Servant" is also about life after dark in Harlem but it is highly political, juxtaposing the subdued, polite black servant of the day with this same liberated reveler of the night, free of the role of servitude to whites he must play during the day. The final line of "Negro Servant" reads:

O, sweet relief from faces that are white!

"Harlem Night Club" and "The Weary Blues" capture in rhyme and rhythm the jazz and dance, and ironically the melancholy, of Harlem night clubs where "whites only" are the patrons. Finally the poem "The Heart of Harlem" celebrates the famous and ordinary people and places, "It's the song with a minor refrain,"² the soul and heart of Harlem. These are only a few of Langston Hughes' poems that focus on Harlem.

The Great Migration

While a few groups of students are reproducing the cosmogram, and another group is reproducing the poem to mount on the cosmogram, yet another group can research on the internet (see suggested web sites in bibliography) and in the book, Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series, the documentation by the Renaissance artist Jacob Lawrence of the great migration of African Americans from the South to the North in the early decades of the 19th Century. Disillusioned with life in the South, African Americans opted for the harrowing gamble of uprooting their families and migrating to the North, in the struggle for survival. This migration of several hundred thousand black people to cities in the North, New York City among them, created a milieu that spawned the Harlem Renaissance. Jacob Lawrence, himself a child of the migration, poignantly documented this migration with some sixty paintings that have been reproduced in the book mentioned in this paragraph.

The 369th Infantry Regiment: Harlem Hell Fighters

It is said that a definitive moment that marked the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance was the victory parade of the 369th Infantry Regiment, 1,300 black heroes known as Harlem Hell Fighters, every man decorated, with the Cross of War, by the French Government, returning from WW I, marching up Fifth Avenue and into Harlem on February 17, 1919. This event which also celebrates the jazz band of James Reese Europe is rich in historical data and photographs, and another group of students could easily research it both on the internet (see suggested web sites in the bibliography) and in books about the Renaissance. David Levering Lewis wrote a highly descriptive essay titled "Fighting on Two Fronts" found in his book *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, about the Victory Parade up Fifth Avenue.

Although James Reese Europe was killed shortly following his return from WW I, he, with his Harlem Band that led the 369th Regiment Victory Parade up Fifth Avenue, is credited with creating a major revelation by introducing jazz to Europe during the war. Europe and his band are interesting topics for research on the internet.

Presentations of: the Cosmogram, the Migration Series, and the 369th Infantry Regiment Victory Parade

Naturally, when the cosmogram is completed and mounted or painted on the floor, those who worked to reproduce it, and those who researched the Great Migration, and those who researched the 369th Infantry Regiment victory parade will make presentations to their classmates. This is an ideal opportunity for collaboration and the security of presenting with peers before classmates. Students, who make up the audience, will take notes on the presentations, adding to their background information on the Renaissance. Ultimately, everyone will play the role of presenter and audience, sharpening both kinds of skills.

Comparing and Reproducing Visual Art (see Lesson Plan 1)

Another exciting project, centering around two famous Renaissance artists, invites students to compare and reproduce two of their paintings: *The Ascent of Ethiopia* by Lois Mailou Jones and *Building More Stately Mansions* by Aaron Douglas, who often is referred to as “the father of African American Art.” Both of these artists are featured in the video, *Against the Odds*, listed in the bibliography. Some students may enjoy reproducing one of these paintings after comparing them, or they may choose to create their own painting on the same topic, or they may wish to reproduce a painting by another artist of the Renaissance. (There is a wealth of Renaissance art on the internet and in the books listed in the bibliography. Palmer Hayden, William Henry Johnson, Augusta Savage, Marvin and Morgan Smith and James VanDerZee are a few artists, sculptors and photographers that they might start with.) Don’t overlook photographs of the ‘20’s and ‘30’s that students could reproduce, using present-day subjects.

The two paintings I have chosen for comparison represent the progression of cultures and civilization from Egypt, and therefore Africa, to the present. The symbols that the two artists have chosen to represent this progression are similar, yet the paintings are very different. While their styles and colors are very different, they express a similar phenomenon. Students will be asked to list everything they see from shapes and figures to objects, including colors in one painting and then the other. The similarities and differences will become evident. I have chosen these two paintings because, similar to the poem by Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” they both ground the African American in the dawn of civilization, a historical topic that was on the minds of Renaissance artists. A reproduction and discussion of Aaron Douglas’s painting may be found in *To Conserve a Legacy*, a brilliant book by Director of the Yale University Art Gallery, Jock Reynolds, and Chair of the Department of Art and Art History at Duke University, Dr. Richard J. Powell, that documents the restoration and conservation of American art from historically black colleges and universities. A reproduction of Lois Mailou Jones’s painting may be found among the wealth of paintings and photographs and text in *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance* by Dr. Richard J. Powell. I plan to make slides of these two paintings so that the students can see each painting larger than life, while they collaborate on the task of identifying shapes, figures, objects and colors.

Interpreting and Illustrating Poetry through Visual Art

Besides the documentation of historical events through visual art, students will see in studying *The Migration Series* of Jacob Lawrence an expression of cultural identity. Students will be introduced to paintings by artists whose paintings interpret poetry. Aaron Douglas did this when he illustrated James Weldon Johnson’s book of seven sermons in verse, *God’s Trombones*, that attempts to capture the folk sermons of the old-time black preacher. Dealing with topics from the creation to judgment day, each poem has been interpreted visually through an illustration by Aaron Douglas, who also illustrated Hughes’s poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” in ink and graphite that may be seen at: www.worldafricanet.com/blackhistory/blackhistory6127.html. Not only is this an opportunity for students to become acquainted with Douglas’s illustrations but students will also read Johnson’s poetic sermons, rich in imagery and lyrics. (Students may view illustrations for the following poetic sermons at web sites. An excellent source for these paintings is *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America*.)

Inspired by these illustrations, students themselves may be encouraged to interpret and illustrate one of

Johnson's poetic sermons. For example, Johnson's highly visual poem "The Creation" concludes with an image of God, the powerful force who has just created the universe, kneeling down like a mammy bending over her baby, kneeling down in the dust and toiling over a lump of clay, until he has shaped and blown the breath of life into man. This is one of a wealth of images that students might choose to interpret through the medium of visual art.

Two dissimilar poems that lend themselves to visual interpretation are the very exotic, pulsating "Heritage" by Countee Cullen and the lyrical "Song of Son" by Jean Toomer. The former holds out verdant images of Africa as a possibility for black cultural identity, while the latter holds up the South with its embodiment of slavery as the true homeland that must be embraced for the black person to know his or her real identity. In his poem "Heritage" Cullen creates lush images of Africa as a possible answer to the question he poses several times, "What is Africa to me?" Concerned with the loss of his past, Toomer, makes contact with the soul-songs of slaves, ghosts in the valleys of his homeland, describing "Negro slaves" as "dark purple ripened plums" that have all but disappeared, but for:

One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes
An everlasting song, a singing tree,
Caroling softly souls of slavery,
What they were, and what they are to me,
Caroling softly souls of slavery.

("Song of Son," 19-23)

There is a wealth of poems that students might choose to interpret through visual art. Two written by Helene Johnson are "Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem" and "Poem," both rich in images celebrating the magnificence of the black race. 5

Posters Advertising Night Club Dances or Entertainers (or Rent-Parties)

One of the big draws in Harlem during the Renaissance was the nightlife that manifested itself at clubs such as the Savoy Ballroom, the Cotton Club, or Smalls Paradise. The patrons that swarmed into these popular jazz clubs were white, and the entertainers were black. Ironically, blacks were not allowed into these popular clubs as patrons. These clubs can be researched on the internet, as can the entertainers who drew record crowds night after night. Among them are: the man considered to be the first significant jazz composer, Jelly Roll Morton; the famous tap dancer, Billy "Bojangles" Robinson; vocalist, Bessie Smith; jazz great, Duke Ellington; trumpeter, Louis "Satcho" Armstrong; songwriting team, Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle; band leader Fletcher

Henderson; vocalist, Florence Mills; Earl “Snakehips” Tucker; and vocalists, Ethel Waters and Billie Holiday. No list is complete without Cab Calloway, the famous, entertaining bandleader and vocalist. Libraries carry CD’s featuring many of these entertainers. There is a thirty-five minute video Cab Calloway and his Orchestra 1935-1950 that documents the flamboyant Cab Calloway. Once students have researched these clubs and entertainers on the Internet and in books listed in the bibliography, they will present and mount their findings, including photographs, on the mural.

The Lindy Hop, named after Charles Lindbergh’s transatlantic flight in 1927 and Swing dance were also very popular in these clubs and can be researched on the Internet. Two videos, Tap with Gregory Hines and Sammy Davis Jr. and The Cotton Club with Gregory Hines, Richard Gere, and Lawrence Fishburn have dance sequences based on tap and swing, and performances at Harlem clubs in the ‘20’s and ‘30’s. The Cotton Club is rated R due to language, but it is possible to select lively sequences that give a flavor of dance during the Renaissance.

Activity: To add to the milieu of the classroom, students will design and create posters advertising these nightclubs, the dances, and the famous entertainers who performed there.

It was not uncommon in Harlem during the ‘20’s and ‘30’s to see flyers or posters advertising “rent parties.” These were literally parties held in private apartments for which participants paid a nominal fee to help pay the rent. Rent parties were also a social outlet for blacks that could not go as patrons to the big name clubs to dance and drink and socialize.

Activity: Students may enjoy making flyers or posters advertising these popular “rent parties.” Langston Hughes wrote a poem titled “Rent-Party Shout: For a Lady Dancer.”

Claude McKay’s Militant Poem in the wake of WW I

Students who research the 369th Infantry Regiment will discover that African American troops were not allowed to fight alongside white American troops in Europe. The 369th was invited by the French to fight with their troops, and fought so bravely that every man was decorated by the French government with the Cross of War before returning to the U.S. Yet, in spite of the dedication of approximately 200,000 African American men who fought in WW I, discrimination was rampant when they returned to the U.S., and in the summer of 1919 thousands of lynchings took place across this country. Not coincidentally, that summer, Claude McKay wrote what has become one of his most famous and by far militant poems, “If We Must Die,” which begins:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot. (1-4)

McKay couches this highly political poem in the highly structured Shakespearean sonnet formula, ending with this heroic couplet:

Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back! (13 - 14)

Zora Neal Hurston Writes of Color-consciousness (Lesson Plan II)

Zora Neal Hurston is considered by many to be among the best writers the Harlem Renaissance produced. It seems appropriate to include one or two of her best-known pieces: an excerpt from her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and her autobiographical essay "How it Feels to be Colored Me." Both describe poignantly some of the profound differences between being black and being white in this culture, the former addressing some of the gross abuses perpetrated on black women during and following slavery, and the latter recounting the progression of Hurston's black consciousness and exposing the white man as an outsider in the consciousness of black culture in the early 1900's.

Either of these pieces lends itself to an activity that appears on the Language Arts section of the CAPT, that is: Write an initial response/reaction to the piece after you have read it. I always encourage students to hi-light or underline sentences or statements that they may want to question and to jot down notes in the margins as we are reading. Most often we read excerpts out loud. It is important when students practice this CAPT activity that they understand they need to write at least a half a page if they hope to receive a passing score. It is not enough for students simply to write that they liked or did not like the piece, or that they found it boring. Often when students practice this activity, it helps to give them some prompt questions from which they can frame a written response. For example, when students are reading the excerpt from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, they will probably comment that they find the dialect difficult; so they might think about why the character called Nanny talks that way, whether she has attended school, ever in her life. What has her life been like? How do they feel about her? Do they like her, dislike her? Why? Do they feel sympathy or compassion for her? How do they feel about her wanting to "marry Janie off?" Do they think Janie does or does not marry the man? What makes them think so? Is Janie right or wrong, in wanting to defy Nanny? What might Nanny mean in her last line, "Put me down easy, Janie, Ah'm a cracked plate."³

Another question that invariably appears in the Language Arts section of the CAPT is one that asks students to comment on the differences in characters, or how the characters feel about each other. Students might discuss the tension that Hurston develops between the characters of Nanny who is Janie's grandmother who has raised her and Janie. Obviously these two black women love each other very much, but Nanny is determined that she will see Janie married to "brother Logan Killicks" before she dies (and she is very old), and Janie is equally determined that, at present, she is not the least interested in marrying anyone. Nanny, who slaps Janie violently when she resists, gives a compelling rationale for her decision by recounting abuses she sustained at the hands of whites, and says to Janie, "Tain't Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it's

protection.” 4 To add to the tension, it remains unclear, at the end of the excerpt, whether Janie will comply.

Arna Bontemps’ short story “A Summer Tragedy” (see Lesson Plan III)

“A Summer Tragedy” serves a double purpose because it depicts the dilemma faced by sharecroppers in the South at the turn of the century, and at the same time, it is an excellent story for practicing the Language Arts CAPT activity that asks students to define good literature and then to critique a short story using their definition. This story helps clarify why sharecroppers from the South comprised a large part of the Great Migration to northern cities. In fact, it is appropriate to study Jacob Lawrence’s paintings, The Migration Series, referred to earlier in this curriculum, in conjunction with this story. Of course, the reader does not know until the end of the story that the old, crippled, handicapped couple in “A Summer Tragedy” have made a suicide pact, rather than migration, as their viable means of escape from the ravages of sharecropping and racism in the South.

A Field Trip to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem

The Schomburg Center on 135th Street and Malcolm X Blvd (Lennox Avenue) in Harlem is one of the world’s foremost research facilities devoted to the collection, preservation, and interpretation of materials documenting black life. Founded by Arturo Schomburg in 1926, during the Renaissance, the Center has amassed more than five million items. At any given time, the Center has on exhibit a wealth of these items, with free admission to the public. It could be said that the Schomburg Center in Harlem is “Mecca” for black culture.

With this Center within the geographical reach of our students, it seems the ideal culmination for this unit to make a well organized, educational visit. The Schomburg in Harlem is a resource that, at the very least, our students should experience. If it is not feasible for all of the students who will have studied and embodied the Renaissance through this unit, to make the trip to the Schomburg, (although that would be ideal), then perhaps it could serve as a “plum” for a select number of students who demonstrate exceptional interest or who have put forth extra effort in the activities in this unit. Once the students have been immersed in the literature, art, music and events that embody the soul of the Renaissance, they should have the opportunity to stand on the actual cosmogram, a powerful symbol of black culture, and to read for themselves, the poignant poem by Langston Hughes:

I’ve known rivers:
I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
Went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
Bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

("The Negro Speaks of Rivers" all)

A "Harlem Renaissance Night" to showcase student work and student readings

Another culminating activity for this curriculum is a "Harlem Renaissance Night" celebration at our school to showcase student work, and engage students, their families, and the community in an enriching cultural celebration. The evening (or midday) will include food, music, dance, poetry recitations, and art that celebrates Harlem's rich history.

It is my goal, during this unit to sponsor a T-shirt design competition. Adhering to certain criteria such as the number of colors that may be used, students will design a T-shirt, that they think represents the Harlem Renaissance. A panel of judges, who do not know which designs belong to which students, will be asked to select the one that it thinks best represents the Renaissance.

I would like to find funding to make it possible to give one of these T-shirts to each student who participated in making the "Renaissance Night Celebration" happen, and sell the shirts to those who did not participate but would like to purchase one. Proceeds from the sale of these shirts, after expenses for those given to students who helped, may be used toward transportation costs for the student trip to the Schomburg.

LESSON PLAN I: Comparing/Contrasting and Reproducing the Paintings of Lois Mailou Jones and Aaron Douglas

In this activity students will actively engage in comparing and contrasting *The Ascent of Ethiopia* by Lois Mailou Jones and *Building More Stately Mansions* by Aaron Douglas. They will then reproduce one of these paintings or create their own painting or artwork that represents the progression of cultures and civilization from Egypt (and therefore Africa) to the present; or reproduce a painting of their choice by a Renaissance artist.

OBJECTIVES

- To familiarize students with two paintings by famous Harlem Renaissance artists whose art focuses on the progression of culture and civilization from Africa to the present.
- To facilitate group participation as students collaborate in analyzing these paintings, observing how each artist uses symbols, shapes, and human figures to express this progression.
- To give students an opportunity to express in writing their observations about the similarities and/or differences in these paintings.
- To give students the opportunity to reproduce a painting, one of these or another of their choice, from the Renaissance; or to create their own artwork that represents this progression of cultures and civilization throughout recorded history.

I suggest telling the students that this lesson will culminate with a hands-on art activity. It will give them a better understanding as to why they are going through the steps in this lesson and may make them more willing to complete the tasks.

I suggest reproducing these paintings as slides so students will see them “larger than life,” as they collaborate in observing symbols, shapes, architecture, human figures, and colors present in each. To carry out this activity, each student will use a graphic organizer for each painting, where, in the left column, he/she will write down the symbols, shapes, etc., (such as “a chemistry beaker,”) in the painting, and across from it, in the right column, he/she will write down the significance of the symbol or shape, (such as, “It represents science.”) Students should include everything they see in each painting.

Students will do this activity together as a class, or they may be separated into teams, perhaps generating some competition.

Once they have completed these organizers, they can compare their findings for each painting, sharing and comparing what they wrote in the right column of their organizers.

Then, with their two organizers side by side, students can compare and contrast these paintings, looking closely at how these two artists represented the progression of culture from the beginning of recorded history. For this activity, students will use a graphic organizer made of two overlapping circles. Each student will list

similarities in the center where the circles overlap and list the differences in the outer left and outer right of the circles. Completing this graphic organizer naturally leads to a “compare/contrast” writing activity.

Students are now ready to begin the hands-on art component of this lesson. They may choose to reproduce one of these paintings or to visit websites to find other Renaissance paintings they might prefer to reproduce. By the time they do this lesson, they will have viewed the video *Against the Odds*, and they may have seen a painting that they would like to reproduce. In fact, when showing this video, encourage them to look for a painting they would like to reproduce. Some students may wish to create their own artwork representing the progression of culture discussed in this lesson. Some students who resist painting may prefer to make a collage.

LESSON PLAN II: A CAPT Language Arts Guided Reaction/Response to the excerpt from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

In the Language Arts section of the CAPT students are always asked to write an initial reaction/response to the story they have read. Generally, anything less than a half a page does not receive a passing score. This writing activity is a good critical thinking skill for all students, and like any skill it improves as students learn what is expected of them and as they practice.

OBJECTIVES

- To encourage students, as they read the story, to hi-light sentences or statements that they may question or want to comment on, and to jot down notes in the margins.
- To encourage students to respond to “prompt” questions that may help them frame their written response.
- To encourage students to write a minimum of half a page.

It helps students if they know, before they read the story, what will be expected of them when they have finished. I explain that they will be expected to write a minimum of a half a page reaction/response to the story. I give each student a hi-lighter, urging them to hi-light any statements that they question or that they want to comment on.

For this particular excerpt I give the students the following prompt questions:

1. Because the dialect may be difficult for students to understand, I ask them to think about why the character Nanny talks the way she does. Has she attended school, ever in her life?
2. What has her life been like? How do they know?
3. How do they feel about her? Do they like her or dislike her? Why?
4. Do they feel any sympathy or compassion for her? Why or why not?
5. How do they feel about her wanting to “marry Janie off?”

6. Do they think Janie does or does not want to marry the man? What makes them think so?
7. Is Janie right or wrong in wanting to defy Nanny? Why?
8. Given her life, what might Nanny mean in her last line, "Put me down easy, Janie, Ah'm a cracked plate."?
9. Do you think Janie marries the man her grandmother has picked out? Why? Why not?
10. Is this tension between Janie and her grandmother to be expected between a young adult and the person raising her? Explain.
11. What tensions does it make you think of between you and your parents or the person raising you? Explain.
12. What was confusing or troubling about the story?

LESSON PLAN III: A CAPT Language Arts Activity based on defining "good literature," and evaluating the story "A Summer Tragedy," using the definition.

The stage will be set for reading, discussing, and evaluating "A Summer Tragedy" by Arna Bontemps, once the students finish exploring Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series: his paintings that document the exodus of black sharecroppers, from the ravages of the racist South in the early 1900's, to the rumored prospects of a better life, in cities in the North. This story, like Lawrence's paintings, exposes the treatment of black sharecroppers in the South, while it serves as an excellent vehicle for the study of what has been the final task in the Language Arts section of the CAPT: "Give your definition of 'good literature,' and discuss, including evidence, in what ways this story fits your definition." CAPT preparation aside, this task of defining good literature and evaluating a story according to that definition is an excellent critical thinking skill, and can be further developed into a writing process activity that produces a five-paragraph essay.

OBJECTIVES

Students will search out reasons why black sharecroppers, who were able, abandoned the South for the North.

They will explore reasons why Bontemps' characters chose another escape (suicide), that could lead to a class discussion on why Bontemps chose to write about characters that were unable to escape through migration.

Students will participate in a teacher-guided collaboration to come up with a working definition for "good literature" that they can use to evaluate "A Summer Tragedy." (I have been successful guiding students into a three-part definition: conflict, character development, and a universal lesson or theme.)

Filling out Graphic Organizers students will observe whether the story fits their definition for good literature, and using these Organizers, they will find evidence from the story for their observations.

Students will use these Organizers to practice writing a basic five-paragraph essay based on the topic: In what ways does "A Summer Tragedy" fit the definition for 'good literature.' Each of the three Organizers provides the content for the three support paragraphs in the body of the five-paragraph essay.

Once the students have participated in a teacher-guided activity to write a definition for "good literature," this definition will be transposed onto the tops of three Graphic Organizers. The definition might read like this: "The majority of good literature, especially stories, must contain a minimum of the following characteristics: (1) a conflict or problem that gets resolved in some way, (2) a character that grows or develops (for better or for worse) in some way, and (3) a lesson about life or society or the world that the author wants to communicate to the reader.

(Graphic Organizers available in print form)@Text:Each of the previous three Graphic Organizers will appear on an 8.5 X 11 inch piece of paper, giving students space to make their observations and copy evidence from the story. These Organizers can be completed by individual students or in teams, giving students the opportunity to collaborate on the task. Once the Organizers have been completed, the entire class can compare their findings, discussing: the conflict or problem that gets resolved in the story, the character who changes or grows in understanding, and the lesson or universal theme conveyed in the story.

This discussion naturally leads to another discussion about why Bontemps chose characters that were unable to escape through migration. Students might consider the impact of characters who pack up and head North to escape the ravages of racism and poverty, as opposed to an old, decrepit, physically handicapped, now childless couple, that sees no way out except through double suicide.

To set up the five-paragraph essay writing activity using the Graphic Organizers, I remind students that their original task was to define "good literature," and to evaluate whether the story "A Summer Tragedy" by Arna Bontemps fits their definition of "good literature." Now, referring to the original task and using their observations and the evidence they have gathered, they will develop a basic five-paragraph essay:

Paragraph 1 (the introductory paragraph) consists of five sentences:

- a sentence clarifying the student's definition of "good literature"
- the thesis statement identifying "A Summer Tragedy" as fitting this definition of "good literature"

- a “controlling idea” sentence constructed from the observation column of G.O.I, stating the conflict in the story
- a “controlling idea” sentence constructed from the observation column of G.O. II, stating how a character changes in the story
- a “controlling idea” sentence constructed from the observation column of G.O. III, stating the lesson or universal theme in the story

Paragraph 2 (the first supporting paragraph) consists of a repetition of the first “controlling idea” sentence about conflict, and observations and evidence from Graphic Organizer I.

Paragraph 3 (the second supporting paragraph) consists of a repetition of the second “controlling idea” sentence about character change, and observations and evidence from Graphic Organizer II.

Paragraph 4 (the third support paragraph) consists of a repetition of the third “controlling idea” sentence about the lesson, and observations and evidence from Graphic Organizer III.

Paragraph 5 (the concluding paragraph) consists of four sentences:

- a variation of the thesis statement from the introductory paragraph
- a variation of the “controlling idea” sentence stating the conflict, from the introductory paragraph
- a variation of the “controlling idea” sentence stating how a character changes, from the introductory paragraph
- a variation of the “controlling idea” sentence stating the lesson, from the introductory paragraph

End Notes

Huggins, 68. Rampersad, 311. Minnesota Humanities, 185. Minnesota Humanities, 181.

Bibliography

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Chock full of photos and illustrations and details documenting 400 years of African-American culture and achievement in New York City.

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Lawrence's life when he produced them. Lawrence was himself a child of the Migration.

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Videos

Cab Calloway and His Orchestra 1935 - 1950. Public Broadcasting System Castle, Nick. Tap, full length movie Coppola, Francis. *The Cotton Club*, full length movie Edwards, Amber. Director. *Against the Odds: The Artists of Harlem Renaissance*. New Jersey Network, 1994. Hartmann, David, and Barry Lewis. *A Walk Through Harlem*. PBS, 1999.

Websites

Jacob Lawrence <http://www.kenyon.edu/projects/neh/art/pages/lawrence.htm>

(a brief biography of Jacob Lawrence, including three of his Migration Series paintings)

<http://www.english.uga/~lboyd/gantner/migrat60.html>

(All 60 images from the Migration Series are available at this site.)

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanvisions/gallery/g_6.5.jacob1.html

(The third panel of Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series shows blacks leaving the South with their belongings. This panel can be enlarged for a close-up view.)

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanvisions/gallery/g_6.5.jacob2.html

(The fifteenth panel of Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series shows a black figure despairing under a lynch noose, in the South.)

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/L/lawrence.html>

(a two-page biography of Jacob Lawrence with discussion of his Migration Series with linking websites)

<http://hudson.acad.umn.edu/Lawrence/WAMLaw.html>

(a photo of Lawrence with his wife Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, with a brief biography and image of his painting Dancing Doll)

http://www.butlerart.com/pc_book/pages/jacob_lawrence_b.htm

(an image of Lawrence's painting The Street with a discussion of this painting and Lawrence's artistic)

<http://www.stan-co.k12.ca.us/ceres/argus/gallery/JL-ART.htm>

(an image of Lawrence's Dancing Doll and a brief chronology of his life)

http://www.artchive.com/artchive/L/lawrence/lawrence_the_library.jpg.html

(a colorful image of Lawrence's The Library, showing a library populated with black figures. The image may be enlarged for close study.)

<http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/pimage?79120+0+0>

(an image of Lawrence's Revolt of the Amistad which is simply timely, given the completion of the ship in Mystic Seaport)

<http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/pinfo?Object=53305+0+none>

(an image of Lawrence's painting Daybreak - A Time to Rest, one in a series that tells the story of Harriet Tubman. This painting helps convey the range of Lawrence's historical work)

369th Infantry Regiment (a.k.a.: Harlem Hell Fighters) <http://www.nara.gov/education/cc/369th.html>

(photos of 369th and their victory parade including a historical account of

their role in WW I)

http://www.ritesofpassage.org/mil_wwone.htm

(history of 369th including photos and some of James Reese Europe with additional account of artist Private Horace Pippin who documented his war experience through his painting, years after the war ended.)

<http://www.worldwar1.com/sfjre.htm>

(site includes photos, and plays war tunes composed by James Reese Europe

Aaron Douglas

<http://www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Harlem/text/adouglas.html>

a brief biography plus photo of Douglas standing in front of his mural.

<http://www.npg.si.edu/exh/harmon/dougharm.htm>

a brief biography of Douglas including a portrait of the artist

<http://www.nku.edu/~diesmanj/godstrombones.jpg>

reproduction of Human Bondage from God's Trombones

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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