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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2000 Volume IV: Ethnicity and Dissent in American Literature and Art

The Harlem Renaissance Births a Black Culture

Guide for Curriculum Unit 00.04.04
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This unit, "The Harlem Renaissance Births a Black Culture," is designed for at-risk high school students. I have found that the students, most of whom are persons of color, at the Wilbur Cross Annex have very limited knowledge of the Harlem Renaissance. I have chosen to create this unit because this historical phenomenon is rich in visual art, literature and music, and because, for many of my students, studying this period can contribute greatly to their understanding of their own heritage.

The study of the Harlem Renaissance lends itself not only to the study of visual arts but to hands on art projects. Also, students can explore the Internet to research a wealth of information that may be found there on this topic. Harlem itself is close enough to New Haven for a field trip to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; and a culminating celebration, "Harlem Renaissance Night," to showcase what students have researched and created seems like another obvious activity to reinforce the content of the unit and to enhance the students' self images.

The lesson plans I have developed focus on art projects that may be done in a school like mine where there is no art program, and on the Language Arts section of the CAPT. I recommend that this unit be team taught by an English teacher and an art teacher, two English teachers, or an English teacher and a social studies teacher.

(Recommended for American Literature, Art, and English, grades 9-12.)

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