



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2022 Volume II: The Long Fight for a Free Caribbean, 1700s-1959

Jacob Lawrence, Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution

Curriculum Unit 22.02.05
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Introduction

When renowned Harlem Renaissance artist Jacob Lawrence completed his forty-one panels telling the story of the Haitian Revolution and the struggle of its most famous leader, Toussaint Louverture, he crafted a visual representation of a history to African Americans that was deep and rich but cast aside in racist mainstream histories. Lawrence, himself, commented on the importance of an honest telling of history, asserting “I’ve always been interested in history, but they never taught Negro history in public schools...I don’t see how a history of the United States, can be written honestly without the Negro.”¹

In fact, Lawrence and his contemporaries were giving African Americans a voice through the incredible talent that called out to the world during the Harlem Renaissance. Writers such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway, singers such Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald and artists such as Jacob Lawrence were, indeed, giving a voice to a people long stifled and silenced due to a world of suppression and slavery. There was a long and rich tradition in African-American communities discussing Haitian Revolution and the fate of Haiti.²

Lawrence first heard the story of Louverture as a young man at the Harlem YMCA³ and was so captivated by the story of the slave turned international hero, that he completed the narrative of the Haitian struggle in his first major work. I first fell in love with the Lawrence panels when I stumbled upon them in an art exhibit in West Palm Beach, when I was there for a magnet schools symposium in 2005. The Lawrence exhibit was a fascinating display of how art can shed light on history and how history can come to life through art.

Through his depiction of Louverture, Lawrence was telling an overlooked history, a suppressed history that needed to be told honestly. As with other artists, musicians and writers during the Harlem Renaissance, Lawrence was lending his talent and giving voice to a people who had not been heard up to that point. While the Louverture panels will be the focus of my unit, Lawrence’s retelling of others in *The Life of Frederick Douglass*, 1938, (forty panels), *The Life of Harriet Tubman*, 1939, (thirty one panels), *The Migration of the Negro*, 1940 – 41, (sixty panels), *The Life of John Brown*, 1941 (22 panels) will also be utilized as students use Lawrence’s ideas and work to tell other histories that might otherwise be overlooked.

Rationale

In this unit our discussion of Lawrence and the Harlem Renaissance will help students better understand the heroism and importance involved in the Haitian Revolution. Focusing on the Louverture panels, students will begin to understand the importance and feasibility of telling stories through history and art. We will look at and read the Louverture panels, focusing on how art and narration can come together to tell a story much like stories are told in graphic novels. I will point out to students that Lawrence's retelling of historical events in this manner really made him a forerunner of the graphic novel, while making important historical events more accessible to a wider array of viewers and listeners.

In this unit, students will be introduced to the history of Haiti and the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804). Most of my students have no idea how important Haiti and other Caribbean nations are to the history of our country and the history of American people. Through this unit students will begin to understand just how deep the roots of our nation truly are and the importance of the revolution in the shaping of American history and the lives of so many Americans.

Through this unit I hope that students will gain many insights and understandings that they previously may not have had. Students will learn about figures from the Harlem Renaissance, focusing on Lawrence and others. Students will learn not only how instrumental that era of American history was in the shaping of the character and culture of our country, but also how important it is to give honest and often overlooked voices to the stories and histories of so many unheard heroes.

Students will gain a new understanding of the importance of biography and storytelling in our lives and how art can be utilized to help tell stories. We all have stories to tell and we all have heroes whose stories have sometimes gone untold. I will challenge students to look at heroes of their own; grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, musicians, and to retell their stories through art and narration much like Lawrence attempted to do through his artwork.

I will ask students to follow Lawrence's example and find a hero, either in history (perhaps figures of the Harlem Renaissance) or in their own lives who has a story to tell. Using art and narration, students will tell the story of their hero and share it with classmates. Linking Lawrence's narration of history through art to the Harlem Renaissance and to my students, this interdisciplinary unit can be shared with art and social studies/history teachers. I hope students will also gain a new appreciation for art for art's sake as well as art as a learning tool that can be used to help us understand and appreciate more of what we see and learn on a daily basis.

The Harlem Renaissance has always been a favorite jumping off point for me to share some of the most influential and intriguing aspects of African American culture to my students. The movement that was really the result of an unhappy populace looking for a better life, seeking a new beginning away from the Jim Crow South, produced dozens of talented musicians, artists, writers and thinkers.

Many times over the years I have taught the Harlem Renaissance to middle school students by utilizing the music of the era. I often start with a quick mention of the *Great Migration*, but did not really take the time to look closely at the roots of the movement. Why was there a need to move? Where was everyone going and what were they looking for? What were they escaping and what were they getting into?

Entering this conversation through art, specifically Jacob Lawrence's telling the story of Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution, as well as his panels on Harriet Tubman and the Great Migration, my unit will take on a deeper meaning as it looks at the roots of what led to the movement and the Harlem Renaissance itself.

Often our best art, our best literature, our best music comes from places of pain. The Harlem Renaissance was not just a collection of families throwing their things in the back of a U-Haul truck and heading north to live with relatives, it was a reaction to the suffering and injustice that had ruined so many lives for so long.

While many middle school students understand that slavery existed in this country during the 18th and 19th centuries, many of them are unaware the sugar plantations which dotted the landscape of the Caribbean like the hundreds of islands which dot the region geographically, were really the foundation and prototype for American plantations which dotted the valleys of the Mississippi and fed into the slave trade in the ports of the American south. Many of my students have deep connections with the Caribbean; a number of them have been and continue to travel to Puerto Rico yearly, I have students who themselves were born or whose parents were born in Haiti, Venezuela, Barbados, and others. I believe this unit will be very important to not only these, but to all of my students as we take a closer look together at a somewhat untold story of an unfair and inhumane history that still shapes our lives today. I believe this unit will be an eye-opening learning experience for all of my students.

Content Objectives

The true heart of my unit involved story-telling. In my classroom we are constantly telling stories in one way or another; we report on books research, we make up fables and short stories, we journal about our own lives and experiences and in the best cases, we share. That is really what makes being a language arts teacher such a privilege; we are always stirring up stories and retelling, sharing and learning.

Lawrence's art told amazing stories; stories of struggle and hardship, stories of heroes and bravery, stories of many cultures. In this unit Lawrence will lead us in an exercise of storytelling, an exercise that my students will be able to replicate in their own way with their own voices.

Along the way, along the journey this unit will take us on, the students will also achieve the following content objective in the classroom:

- Students will be introduced to the history of slavery and the slave trade in the Caribbean.
- Students will be able to identify key areas and factors having to do with the story of the Haitian Revolution and the plight of Toussaint Louverture on a map.
- Students will read a brief biography of Toussaint Louverture.
- Students will construct journal entries based on their research/study of the Caribbean.
- Students will participate in a Harlem Renaissance Internet scavenger hunt
- Students will be introduced to the art and participants of the Harlem Renaissance through the art of Jacob Lawrence.

- Students will be introduced to Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution through the artwork of Jacob Lawrence.
- Students will become familiar with the concept of storytelling through art by viewing Lawrence’s Toussaint panels as well as the Great Migration, Harriet Tubman and the Fredrick Douglass panels.
- Students will experiment with art, creating their own panels to tell the story of a figure from the Harlem Renaissance or someone from their own life.
- Students will work collaboratively in this multi-disciplinary project.
- Students will work with a variety of media and technology in order to tell their stories.
- Students will present work in a gallery setting among peers and other teachers

Background

The Haitian Revolution

The Haitian Revolution was a series of conflicts that began with a slave revolt in August of 1791 and ended with Haiti being the first country in the world to be founded by freed slaves. The island of Hispaniola, like so many islands in the Caribbean, had a history scared by European conquest and colonization and brutal conditions on plantations that were nothing but money makers for wealthy Europeans, most of whom were not present on the islands at all. In 1791, the island of Hispaniola was run by Spanish in Santo Domingo (present-day Dominican Republic) and French in Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti). When sugar plantations began feeding the world’s sweet tooth, competition for these profitable plantations drove the European powers to vie for power and dominance throughout the Caribbean.

The human cost of this surge for power and wealth was immense. The plantations could not be run without laborers and it soon became apparent that the increased need for labor would be filled through the slave trade. Laurence Dubois writes in *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean*, “By 1790, after several years of record-breaking African imports, there were at least a half-million slaves in Saint-Domingue; they outnumbered white colonists by more than ten to one.”⁴ Conditions on the plantations were horrendous as the enslaved endured ill treatment and harsh living and working conditions. Saint-Domingue was ripe for revolution.

In August of 1791 a slave revolt in northern Saint Dominique started the revolution which would eventually lead to freedom for slaves in Hispaniola. Ten thousand slaves rose up, killing colonists and burning plantations. Three months later the number of insurrectionists rose to 80,000.⁵

Toussaint Louverture, the son of slaves, freed ten years before the revolution, joined the insurrection and was soon leading his own army against Spanish forces. Louverture quickly became a pivotal player in the revolution, combining his charisma and intelligence to gain support and play the European conquerors against each other.

Louverture utilized unconventional fighting techniques such as ambush, intimidation and harassment to defeat others. His knowledge of the terrain combined with guerilla warfare propelled him to be known as the leader of the revolution. Sudhir Hazareesingh writes in *Black Spartacus, The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture*,

“Toussaint not only anticipated the nature of the war of liberation: he also devised the strategy successfully pursued by the insurgents. The meticulous concealment of weapons, the scorched-earth policy, the systematic destruction of the economic apparatus of the colony (sugar production ground to a complete halt by the end of 1802), the retrenchment of rebel forces on higher ground and the appeal of the *leveen masse*- all there were his ideas;”⁶

Louverture's martial skills combined with his political savvy led him to become a top-ranking military leader of French forces and who eventually declared himself “governor for life” of Saint Domingue. He led a complicated campaign, at first supporting Spain, then France and secretly communicated with his rivals, even England, while positioning himself as a leader. Although Louverture’s strategic positioning made him a controversial figure in some ways, his dedication to freeing slaves or improving conditions on plantations remained at the heart of his epic struggle in Saint-Domingue.

When Napoleon’s French forces again invaded Saint-Domingue in 1802, Louverture again went on the offensive and attacked the French forces he once supported, but in June he and his family were captured and deported to France.

By the time Toussaint Louverture died imprisoned in Fort de Joux, an isolated medieval French prison, in April of 1803 his legendary reputation as a leader of the Haitian revolution was secured. Hazareesingh writes in *Black Spartacus*, “By the end of the nineteenth century, Toussaint and the Haitian Revolution had become powerful symbols of collective emancipation, inspiring men and women far and wide, from the Atlantic right across to Maori communities in New Zealand;”⁷

After his death, Louverture’s heroic reputation continued to grow in tales and songs, on stamps and coins, in movies and literature on statues and memorials and in portraits and paintings, almost always in a heroic posturing. In the final of a series of four prints commissioned by Haitian president Jean-Pierre Boyer, Louverture is portrayed, Christ-like passing away in the arms of his servant in Fort de Joux. His prone body, cradled by the servant in the misty dark cell, is only highlighted by the sunlight coming in through the bared window, shining on him with angelic hope and peace. A century later at the height of another movement aimed at gaining rights and freedoms denied descendants of American slaves, another depiction of the heroism of Toussaint Louverture would be born at the hands of one of the Harlem Renaissance’s great artist; Jacob Lawrence.

Louverture’s role in the Haitian revolution is a complex story that will be new to many of my middle school students. In order to get a more concrete overview of this history I will turn to one of several sources that will give students a brief introduction to the era in a readable format that will not only keep them interested in the topic, but will also help them visualize and understand the story without becoming too overwhelming. A brief visual summary of the revolution along with illustrations and narration is provided online on a comic website called The Nib (<https://thenib.com/haitian-revolution/>). The retelling of the story entitled *The Slave Revolution that Gave Birth to Haiti*, was created by Rocky Cotard and Laurent Dubois, a leading expert on Haiti and Louverture.

Another tool that will be convenient at this point in the unit will be a wall map that I regularly utilize when talking about many aspects of both fiction and nonfiction. I find it useful to help students sort of situate themselves with a map before talking about stories, authors, histories and the like. In this case before even getting into the revolution and the role of Louverture, I will ask students to identify where they are on the map and where Haiti and various other points in the Caribbean are. Utilizing the map as I present the Nib comic to

the students will provide students with a solid foundation from which to start their journey.

Jacob Lawrence and the Harlem Renaissance

Making the transition from the Haitian Revolution to Jacob Lawrence and the Harlem Renaissance is not as difficult as it may seem at first. The plantation system developed and exploited throughout the Caribbean was really a prototype what would become the norm in the southern United State during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Dubois writes, “The era of the slave revolution in the French Caribbean was a turning point in the history of the Atlantic slave system. It was an essential part of not only the history of the islands but also the history of New World slavery, of US history during the early republic, of Latin American independence and the emergence of the nation-state in the nineteenth century.”⁸

After the U.S. Civil War, slaves were “freed” into the Jim Crow south where little opportunity or chance for advancement awaited them. The “Great Migration” that took place at the beginning of the 20th century was the result of a displaced people looking for a better life, looking for a missing common culture, in search of an identity that was taken from them. The Harlem Renaissance, like so much of the history of the United States really does have its roots in the atrocities first committed in the Caribbean.

The Harlem Renaissance is an amazing unit of study for middle school students. As an arts magnet school seems to have something for everyone, the Harlem Renaissance also has someone that will interest everyone. The stories that came out of the Great Migration, and led to the cultural explosion centered in Harlem, are too numerous to mention here, but the common thread that ran through all of the stories and through all of the effort was a desire for freedom: freedom to be who one wanted to be, freedom to express oneself, freedom to live and love like everyone else. Students marvel at the stories and love to explore the art.

Jacob Lawrence’s art is especially interesting for a language arts class because much of his work told a story. Lawrence’s work depicts scenes that he saw around him in Harlem. He used bright colors that imply action and movement in scenes that students can relate to. In his more epic panels, Lawrence retold stories that he had learned growing up in Harlem. His work really documents important events in the struggle for freedom that was at the very heart of the Harlem Renaissance. Lawrence’s depiction of *The Great Migration* is a series of sixty panels that touch on issues that the southern migrants faced as they relocated from the south. They are issues and challenges that we as a nation still struggle with today: unfair working conditions, discrimination, racism and violence are explored in the migration series.

Similarly, Lawrence told the stories of those who he saw as leaders in the ongoing struggle for equal rights and the fight to end racial discrimination. His thirty panels on Harriet Tubman depict the bravery and courage that it took to stand up to the wrongs that Lawrence saw in American society. Series of panels telling the stories of Frederick Douglass, John Brown, and Henry Clay depict heroes of the struggle through narrative depictions.

One of Lawrence’s earliest exhibitions included his series on Toussaint Louverture and the struggle for independence in Haiti. Lawrence created the series of forty-one panels based on research into the Haitian leader’s part in the revolution. In the Louverture panels, as in many of his other panels, Lawrence wrote brief narrations. Sudhir Hazareesingh writes in *Black Spartacus*, “The overall aim, as Lawrence later declared, was to use the examples of the Haitian Revolution to challenge the ‘economic and racial slavery’ of modern times.”⁹ Much like Billie Holiday’s lyrics in *Strange Fruit*, or Langston Hughes’ message in *I too*, Jacob Lawrence was using his talent to make a statement to add to the cause and fight in his own way against

discrimination.

Viewing Art as Narrative

At this point in the unit, I will focus more on Lawrence's panel collections to give students a chance to review how the artist worked and how he used his panels to tell stories. This is a great opportunity for students to work in groups and explore the panel collections for a day or two. I will assign the larger panel collections to groups, but save the Louverture collection for us to examine as a class. In this way I believe students will be able to make their own discoveries about the stories Lawrence was telling us and will be well-equipped to dive into the Louverture collection as a class before we move on to our culminating project.

A great way to start students off examining artwork might be to utilize what was taught to me several years ago at a workshop with the Yale Museum of British Art as the *MoMA Method* of viewing art. In this method teachers are encouraged to help students make their own discoveries and interpretations as to what is being depicted or related in the art. We start with a moment of silent viewing before sharing ideas. The teacher then invites students to start their own interpretations of the art with a simple question: *What do you see?* The students share what they see and the teacher validates the answer by simply restating the observation exactly as it is said, with no judgment.

When students begin to interpret or make meaning of the art as opposed to identifying simply what they see, the teacher responds with simple, open ended questions: *What makes you say that? What else can you say about that?* The interaction with the art becomes deeper as the teacher encourages students to make connections or incorporate simple activities (journal writing, posing like the picture, and drawing) that allow students to interact with each other and the art itself. Finally some reflection helps students synthesize what they have learned through their observations. This relatively simple exercise in art observation can lead to deeper insights and students' growing comfort in interpreting all works of art. To learn more about viewing art and for additional resources on using art in the classroom go to https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning.

The Final Project: Narrative Panels of One of My Heroes

The final project of the unit will be a culmination of our study and a creative way for all of us to tell the story of one whom we individually look up to. This part of the unit can be a bit tricky depending on how much teachers want to expand on or tweak the assignment.

This is also a good point in the unit to stop and reflect on everything that we have talked about and explored during the unit with a little more emphasis on what Lawrence was attempting to do with his narrative panels. A class discussion of the panels which groups already looked at and a teacher led discussion of the Louverture panels at this point can lead students toward my goal which is to tell the story of one of their heroes or someone they look up to.

Another point regarding larger projects such as this one, teachers should do all of the activities they are asking students to do. For example we open with a journal entry on important people in our lives. Teachers should be prepared to share an example of their own entry before asking students to proceed. This goes for every aspect of the unit, including the narrative panels that will be produced at the end. Be prepared to *show* what you mean through your own work.

Students start work on the project through a simple journal entry on who in their own life they look up to. Encourage them to think of parents, grandparents, siblings, coaches, aunts, uncles, and teachers. Students

are surrounded by inspirational individuals; choosing one and discovering more about him/her/they, and retelling their stories will be the challenging and most rewarding part of this unit.

Once students have discovered their topics, a session on formulating questions will help them to prepare for interviewing and gathering information on their topics. Formulating open ended questions that lead students to make exciting discoveries will take a day or two of discussion. Leading a whole class discussion will help students recognize the difference between a closed ended question and an open ended question. Help student change closed ended questions into open ended questions and vice-versa so they are comfortable formulating meaningful questions that will help them in this project as well as future research. Utilize journals to formulate some questions as a class and then ask students to add to their list on their own. Finally, to close this section ask students to share and borrow ideas from each other in a whole class exercise.

Students should utilize these questions to interview the person of their choice. If they cannot think of a person to interview, suggest students tell the story of one of the figures from the Harlem Renaissance. Instead of actually interviewing the figures, students can use the questions to guide their research.

Once the needed information has been compiled, show students how to transform this into a short narrative. Keep referring to the Lawrence panels and your own work to help students understand that these or brief biographies in which the main accomplishments or challenges of the topic will be highlighted. Have students divide their findings into short blurbs. Utilize journals to do a rough draft of their project, treating each separate page in their journal as a panel and a two to three sentence narrative of what is to be depicted on the particular panel. Encourage students to focus on getting the written narrative correct and just use simple illustrations (stick figures?) to illustrate the words.

Once students have a rough draft of their projects in their journals, have the discussion on creating the panels. If you are working with an art teacher on the unit, they will have a lot of ideas and should be a very helpful resource at this point. If you are not an art teacher, or don't have access to one, have a discussion with the class on all the possibilities that creating their own individual panels can take. Everything from stick figures to crayon, to oil paintings, collages, pen and ink, and many others are possibilities for the art work itself. The art work can be as individualized and unique as each student. I will, however ask students to keep the panels to a certain size and also decide on what kind of backing or framing can be the cohesive thread that will run through the exhibition itself.

We take chances as teachers all the time. This section of the unit is probably the most dangerous to those of us who do not like to let go a bit in the classroom. Your classroom is about to become an art studio filled with more than a dozen artists doing their own thing in their own media at their own pace and at their own creative capacity. It could be a little chaotic, but should also be a lot of fun.

The final component of this unit is the art exhibit walk through itself. To what degree you want to take this exhibit is, of course up to you. Will students display their work in your classroom in a permanent exhibit for themselves and others? Is there a hallway or area in your school where you and your class can set up their work, or will the local library allow you to borrow some space in their facility for a temporary show? Who will be invited? Will students create invitations? Will there be an opening with a three string quartet and cheese and crackers? All of these are possibilities at the point in the unit. The important thing is that students are able to share their work in some way in a different sort of setting. It is a celebration of art, of creativity, and most importantly of your students 'accomplishments.

Lessons/Activities

Lesson One- Introducing the Roots of the Revolution

This initial lesson is meant to start out the unit. It will rely heavily on maps and will also contain a journal writing component meant to help students empathize with the Haitian revolutionaries.

Maps and dates are always important to highlight with students in middle school and probably in high school as well. I regularly gauge students' knowledge and try to engage them in a timeline that will help them better understand the literature and history in relation to their own lives. For example when studying Walt Whitman and the Civil War, I will begin our study with a question such as, "What was the American Civil War and when did it happen?" Many of the answers I get to this sort of question show me that students often don't have themselves situated in a timeline that will allow them to take a useful perspective. It is important to get students settled into some simple parameters before launching into lessons anchored in history and culture of another era.

For this unit, like so many other topics I have taught, I'll begin by utilizing a map of the area to be discussed. We will begin with a class discussion, "Who knows anything about Haiti? Who can identify Haiti on the map? Where are we located on the map?" I will show students Haiti in relation to the United States and Western Africa where many of the slaves in the Caribbean originated from.

At this point I will utilize a site we used during the seminar which shows slave voyage routes from West Africa to the Caribbean. (<http://www.slavevoyages.org>) This site has a host of information on the slave trade in the Caribbean. Teachers should look through the database and choose appropriate material for students to use. Invite students to question and explore the ugly reality of slavery in the Caribbean by starting a class K-W-L chart. "What do we know about Haiti and slavery? What do we want to know and what have we learned?" Keep the chart up in the room and allow students to add to it when they have questions or observations they would like to share with others.

Finally on this initial introductory day for students I will ask them to respond to one of two journal prompts which I will post in the classroom. The journal prompts will lead students to empathize with those suffering through the terrible ordeal of life on a sugar plantation. Possible prompts might be; "Write a first person account of a person being taken from his home and transported to another world. What do you think would be going through that person's mind as he is transported away from his home?" Another prompt might ask, "What might have been an alternative to slavery in the Caribbean? People chose to kidnap workers from Western Africa and make them slaves. What alternative actions or ideas might have changed the course of history regarding slavery?"

Students will share their responses with partners or in small groups.

Lesson Two- Introduction to the Harlem Renaissance

Having spent a few days on an introduction to Haiti and the Haitian revolutions, this second lesson is meant to come after the reading on Haiti and Toussaint Louverture provided by the Nib cartoon that was mentioned earlier in the unit. After going through the graphic representation of the revolution, students will have a general understanding of what was happening in the Caribbean during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Once again, much like I started the introductory lesson on Haiti, I turn to my wall map for an introduction to the Harlem Renaissance. “What does renaissance mean? Where is Harlem on the map? What do you think Harlem Renaissance means? Lead a brief discussion on the Harlem Renaissance with students and include a video clip to introduce the era to them. A number of short introductory clips are available online, depending on what age group you are working with. I like to use PBS for a lot of my background information. Try <https://www.pbs.org/video/i-too-sing-america-harlem-renaissance-100-ty4gr7/> for a short, general clip on the Harlem Renaissance that will give students some background on the era

Explain the term “Great Migration,” which will come up in many resources attempting to explain the Harlem Renaissance, then utilize the clip of Jacob Lawrence himself talking about the importance of the migration to him and his family at <https://lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org>.

Let students participate in a Harlem Renaissance internet scavenger hunt before beginning to share more about the wonderful art, music and talent that came out of the era. It’s easy to produce a scavenger hunt on Google docs. Just ask students to define terms like the Harlem Renaissance and the Great Migration. Have them find two musicians, two writers, two artists and two singers from the era, and ask them to sample the art.

Finally, after students have had a chance to explore the Harlem Renaissance on their own, have the class come back together and share their findings, Take a day or two to sample the music, the poetry the dance of the era. Let students hear and read samples from the Harlem Renaissance so that they can truly appreciate that genius that came out of the era.

Lesson Three- The Final Project

The final project in this unit is a large multi-layered one that will take more than a few days to complete. Students will choose a topic, be it someone from their own life, someone from the Harlem Renaissance or other. They will have to formulate interview, or research questions, conduct an interview or conduct research, write up their findings in smaller digestible chunks to accompany the visual representations, actually create the artwork to accompany their findings and finally combine the two in a Jacob Lawrence like piece of art to display with their classmates in an art opening in which you are the coordinator of this wonderful learning experience.

This particular lesson will fall in the middle of the process and is key to the success of the rest of the project. Choosing a topic focus and brainstorming interview or research questions and utilizing the information gathering part of this unit that may be the most challenging for students.

As mentioned earlier in the unit, teacher participation in the creation of the project is key to conveying your expectations to students. It really is showing as opposed to telling, so challenge yourself to participate in the process and get your hands dirty as you join your students on a journey of discovery and creativity. Show students your thought process as you ponder who from your own life you might decide to document in your own panel project. Think about who influenced you most, who had the most impact in your or others’ lives, who overcame life challenges to get what he or she sought in life. If students are having trouble thinking of someone from their own lives, remind them of the characters we met through our study of the Harlem Renaissance; Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Cab Calloway, Marian Anderson and scores of others who overcame numerous personal and cultural barriers to achieve their goals in life. Set up a parking lot (sheet of chart paper) on the wall and give students sticky notes to put their ideas up on the wall.

Next students should begin to brainstorm the questions that will lead to them making discoveries about their

subjects either through interviews or research. Take a moment to discuss the difference between open ended and closed ended questions and have students sit in groups and brainstorm their questions together. After students have had time to work in small groups on brainstorming questions, ask the class to come back together and ask each group to star three or four questions which they thought were especially strong or useful. Get another piece of chart paper out on which to write, "Our best interview Questions." Call on the groups to share their favorites which you list on the chart paper. After sharing, each group should post their chart paper somewhere in the room.

Finally, ask students to take out their journals and write down ten interview questions that they would like to utilize in their interviewing/research. Allow students to browse the various lists around the room as they find question that will work for them. Students will have dozens of questions to choose from.

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the Louverture series.

Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Black Spartacus*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020. This complex and very readable book gives readers a deep understanding of Toussaint Louverture's personality and traits that led him to be one of the most admired leaders of the Haitian Revolution.

White, Ashli. *Encountering Revolution; Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2012. This book examines the effects the Haitian Revolution had on the United States in the late 18th/early 19th centuries.

Student Resources

Bello, Bayyinah. *SHEROES of the Haitian Revolution*. Baltimore: Thorobred Books, 2019. This illustrated volume highlights the heroism of ten women who were instrumental in the efforts of the Haitian Revolution.

Lawrence, Jacob. *Harriet and the Promised Land*. New York: Aladdin Paperback edition, 1997. This picture book by Jacob Lawrence includes an introduction written by the author as well as the panels and narration of the series. This book will be a valuable resource in explaining and sharing Lawrence's style.

Myers, Walter Dean. *The Great Migration: An American Story. Paintings by Jacob Lawrence with a poem of Appreciation by Walter Dean Myers*. New York: Harper Collins, 1995. This collection of the sixty panels of the Lawrence Migration series, combined with an introduction and including Lawrence's narration also includes a poem of appreciation written by Walter Dean Myers. This picture book is an excellent resource for this unit.

Myers, Walter Dean. Illustrated by Jacob Lawrence. *Toussaint L'ouverture; The Fight for Haiti's Freedom*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996. This book combines the narrative skills of Walter Dean Myers with the artwork of Jacob Lawrence. A vital resource for this unit.

Sullivan, Charles, editor. *Children of Promise: African American Literature and Arts for Young People*. New York: Abradale Press, 1991. This book contains a variety of art and literature done by and about African Americans, including paintings by Jacob Lawrence and literature by Langston Hughes and others.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.5 Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas. *Students are asked to reflect on Lawrence's use of art and text to create narratives.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. *The students are asked to read the Nib piece (graphic interpretation) on the Haitian revolution as well as readings of and about Lawrence's narratives.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes. *The students retell the stories of their chosen*

subjects through art and narration.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences. *The creative nature of the final project allows students to retell experiences of others in a well-structured series of panels and narrative text.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. *Students are asked to utilize journals for entries related to the discussions as well as leading up to and conducting interviews with chosen subjects.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. *Throughout the unit, students are asked to share and engage each other in their ideas.*

¹ Nesbett, Peter. *Jacob Lawrence: The Complete Prints, 1963-2000: a Catalog Raisonné* (Seattle: Francine Seders Gallery, 2005), 16.

² See the work of Brandon Byrd (*The Black Republic*), Ashli White (*Encountering Revolution*), Leslie Alexander (*Fear of A Black Republic*), Alfred Hunt (*Slumbering Volcano*), Sara Fanning, Maurice Jackson, and others. See especially Matthew Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War*.

³ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Black Spartacus* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 2020), 351.

⁴ Laurent Dubois and John Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804* (Boston; Bedford/St.Martin's Press, 2006), 13.

⁵ Hazareesingh 48.

⁶ Hazareesingh 325.

⁷ Hazareesingh 345.

⁸ Dubois and Garrigus 8.

⁹ Hazareesingh 351.

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