



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1978 Volume II: 20th Century Afro-American Culture

Harlem Renaissance: Pivotal Period in the Development of Afro-American Culture

Guide for Curriculum Unit 78.02.03
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There are two main objectives developed in this unit on the Harlem Renaissance: to present an historical and literary montage of the period to assemble a comprehensive bibliography for both teacher and student use. Its primary function is to acquaint teachers with the period that began in the 1920s and ended in 1938 with the publication of Richard Wright's "Uncle Tom's Children." The historical framework is presented in a detailed overview that becomes the first half of the narrative portion. The second half turns to a more specific emphasis on the literature of the period. Examples of several major Renaissance themes are incorporated and discussed: a) the expression of pride and dignity bordering on defiance; b) atavistic yearnings for Africa; c) exploration of southern Black culture through folk forms; d) Afro-American exoticism; e) subtle political parody of the era. The bibliographies are long and detailed; they include a student reading list (by author), a primary source list for teachers that covers both literary and non-fiction works of the period, and a secondary source bibliography on significant critical materials. The unit is designed to cover nine weeks of a high school level Afro-American literature elective but could be easily adapted or abbreviated for regular English and/or History class use. There is a description of the nine-week sequence of lessons that includes three fully developed sample lesson plans. A slide set on the Harlem Renaissance is available through the Institute office.

(Recommended for a comprehensive High School elective in Afro-American literature for college-bound students.)

Key Words

Literature Harlem Renaissance General Afro-Americans History

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