



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1991 Volume I: Regions and Regionalism in the United States: Studies in the History and Cultures of the South,
The Northeast and the American Southwest

African American Literature: A Contrast between North and South

Curriculum Unit 91.01.07
by Beverly White

Introduction

An aim of this curriculum unit is to have students discover the correlation between the characteristics of people and a region. Each region of our country has its own set of values that are unique to that section of the country. These values influence the characteristics of the life and the people of a particular region. The two regions that I will be concerned with are the North and the South.

Southerners are described as family-oriented, friendly, hospitable and loyal. They are said to be more religious, secure and approachable. Southerners also are thought to be naive, culturally deprived and not as competitive, focused and aggressive as their Northern counterparts. Blacks from the South have a stronger self-identity, and are more comfortable with their Blackness. Ralph Moore, an entrepreneur and native of Chicago, says "In the South you know you are Black and you accept that fact and, consequently you are more comfortable with your Blackness." ¹

Words like energetic and aggressive are used to characterize Northern Blacks, who are perceived to be more sophisticated, fashionable, more culturally aware and enterprising. Northerners also are viewed as callous, skeptical and suspicious. Due to the stressful environment of the urban North people are more afraid, less friendly and less open to others. "Many Blacks in the North gravitate toward white social values and even try to cut ties to the Black community and ignore the impact of skin color," says Ralph Moore. ²

I hope to make students aware of these regional characteristics through the prose and poetry that we will cover in the unit. For example, George Wylie Henderson's *Ollie Miss* gives an accurate picture of the values held in high esteem by rural Southern Blacks such as they were very religious, respectful, humble, hard-working and had high moral and ethical standards.

On the other hand Blacks who had migrated North found themselves in an alien setting where they felt it necessary to shed their "down home" image for a more accepted city persona that extolled materialistic, hedonistic, deceptive and hypocritical behaviors. A novel that is illustrative of these characteristics and contains some measure of the urban experience is *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

Another aim of this unit will be to acquaint students with the terms Great Migration and the Harlem

Renaissance. I feel that it is important for the development of their personal pride and sense of identity that they be aware of their family origins. The migration north would be made to come alive and not just another term to learn if in talking to family members they discovered that their family is in New Haven because their ancestors left the South during the migration period.

When Blacks left the South they expected to find the “promised land” in the North, but in many instances they traded one type of slavery and drudgery for another only this time in an urban setting. The gloomy side of the black urban experience was the disappointment in not finding a utopia. Also many discarded their moral upbringing to take on the “evil” ways of the North. I want my students to realize (especially the minority students who experience many negative situations in their lives that there is always a bright side of life and one is not doomed) that there was an extremely positive side of the Northern experience, namely the Harlem Renaissance.

In the 1920’s urban Blacks expressed themselves culturally in this artistic and literary movement. I would want my students to first become acquainted with the term and its meaning. Then I would want them to gain an appreciation for the people and their works who were the players in this modern renaissance such as the writers Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay and Richard Wright. In the curriculum unit I will use either the prose or the poetry of these writers.

Although I teach freshmen, sophomores and juniors I would tend to use a unit such as this with the eleventh graders. At the high school where I teach we coordinate the teaching of history and English. Students take American history in their junior year; therefore, this unit would fit in well with the history because the literature that I would be using is American. Not only would students read American literature, they would be able to relate the prose or poetry to a period in history. They would be able to know what was happening in our country at the time a piece of literature was written or set.

The unit should take from half a marking period (5 weeks) to an entire marking period (10 weeks) depending upon the level of the students and how much of the unit and in what detail the teacher would want to cover it. An appropriate time of year to begin the unit would be during the second semester in February which is Black History Month. I work with a large population of Black students who would benefit from knowing about their heritage in the United States. I find that so many young people limit their interests to the here and now. But the knowledge gained from the past, especially when it shows how a group of people triumphed and were able to blossom in a hostile environment, would build pride and lift self-esteem.

This curriculum unit can be divided into four sections. The first section gives the introduction to the unit. The second section outlines a history of Black Americans, their life in the rural South through the period when they migrated to the urban North. The second section of history is interspersed with examples of literature that are appropriate for the period and with questions and activities.

The third section will include the Harlem Renaissance and sample lesson plans. The final section will contain an annotated bibliography for students and teachers.

History, Literature, Activities and Questions

After the civil War the majority of Black Americans lived in the rural South. Although these people were no longer slaves, their former owners sought to control them through sharecropping and tenancy. The newly freed blacks wanted nothing more than to escape from the plantation, have their own farm and decide how

their families lived and worked. In order to reach these goals they needed land.

The government intervened and thousands of 40-acre plots were distributed to Black families with the thought that legislation would help the families purchase the land, but in many instances the blacks were evicted from the land due to lack of material assistance.

Despite the failure of the government concerning land for blacks, many people were able to purchase farms. But for the majority of people just emerging from slavery, economically deprived, even the low land prices were more than they could afford.

The newly-freed, landless, former slaves seemed to provide the solution to the question of what would replace slavery. The planter was in a difficult position. He still had his land, but it was worthless if he could not get the labor to work it.

The practice followed by Southern planters to get the necessary labor to work the land was sharecropping. In this system the planter paid the worker with a share of the crop at the end of the year rather than cash every day, week or month. The Black worker and his family were assigned a plot of land to till. To an outside observer the site looked like a family farm even though the farmer did not own the land.

In time this arrangement began to resemble slavery. The sharecropper was not given money for his labor, only part of the crop at the end of the season. In the meantime he needed credit to buy the necessities for himself and his family. He received credit from the local merchants. The goods that he purchased on credit were marked up much higher than those bought with cash. Therefore, the slavery was imposed through an endless cycle of debt. Given these extraordinary credit costs it is easy to see how Southern sharecroppers found it difficult to make ends meet.

In an effort to make the idea of credit and debt, taken from the sharecropper's situation, seem relevant to the students I would invite a credit counselor to spread about managing money and credit so that they would have some financial Guidelines for taking control of their present and future finances.

A novel that I would like to use with the students this time would be George Wylie Henderson's *Ollie Miss* because it gives an accurate view of life on a rural Southern farm. Uncle Alex, the proprietor of the farm where Ollie Miss works, is one of the fortunate blacks who were able to scrape together enough money to purchase a farm.

Ollie is very respectful and kind to Uncle Alex and to all of the other workers on the farm, although she is not always treated kindly by some of the women. She is a proud, hard-working woman of a few words who labors untiringly in Uncle Alex's fields. She makes no demands on others other than to be left alone to live her life as she sees fit. Her high moral standards are reflected in the manner in which she rebuffs the advances of the men on the farm who desire a sexual relationship with her. Ollie is physically strong and attractive and possesses a voluptuous body. She has no desire for any of these men because her heart belongs to Jule.

In the novel we see the social and religious life of the farm workers. After the crops were harvested there was leisure time and the camp meeting was held. People would flock to the meeting site in a merry mood because they could rest from their labor in the fields and have a good time greeting friends, having romantic liaisons, and at the same time meet their religious obligations.

In her book, *Plantation Mistress*, Catherine Clinton commented that the camp meetings attracted enthusiastic

crowds. These religious celebrations served social as well as spiritual needs. Many of the attendees said that the camp meetings created a festival atmosphere. All kinds of things went on outside of the church, such as people getting into fights, vendors selling food, couples taking romantic moonlight walks and having a jolly time generally. She goes on to say that it was hard to tell whether these meetings resulted in good or evil. ³

Here is a list of general questions and writing activities for *Ollie Miss*

1. Choose any one of the main characters to analyze. Write a character analysis.
2. Write a detailed description of Southern rural life as seen in *Ollie Miss* .
3. Ollie rejects the sexual advances of the men who work on the farm What does this reveal about her character?
4. This novel takes place in rural Alabama in the late 1920's or early 1930's when there was a good deal of racial prejudice in the South. How do blacks and whites get along? Give some specific examples.
5. Describe any incidents of violence in the novel. Does the violence come from within or without of the black community?
6. Why does the pregnant Ollie allow Jule to leave her?
7. Explain in your own words what Ollie is telling Jule on pages 272-273.

Another example of literature with a Southern setting is Langston Hughes' "Red-Headed Baby." ⁴ This short story with a sexual theme deals with an exploitive black/white relationship. These relationships were of a clandestine nature which overtly resulted in the birth of many mulatto children. I would be using this unit with eleventh graders who would be mature enough to handle this strong material.

"Red-Headed Baby" is set in an impoverished rural area of Florida. The story opens with Clarence, a white seaman on a "tramp" ship, coming to visit a Black girl, Betsy, he visited three years earlier. The docking area is so barren and poor that there is nothing to do "except get drunk and go out and sleep with niggers."

It is evident that Betsy and her old mother earn their living from Betsy's prostitution with white clientele, because when Clarence comes up the walkway Betsy's mother says, "I knowed you was some white man comin' up de walk," Clarence thinks, "Same old woman, wrinkled as hell, and still don't care where the money comes from."

Betsy is described as a "Young yellow girl in a white house dress. Oiled hair, Skin like an autumn moon. Goldripe young yellow girl with a white house dress to her knees. Soft plump bare legs, color of the moon."

Betsy's mother pours Clarence a drink and he is set to stay all night. Their night of greatly anticipated revelry is disrupted when Betsy's red-headed child peeps into the room and is seen by Clarence. The child naturally

gravitates toward Clarence out of curiosity because they both share the same red hair. Clarence becomes enraged when the little boy, who is obviously his son, grabs his legs. Clarence immediately wishes to leave this unpleasant situation because he wants no responsibility and nothing to do with the half-black, illegitimate child. He pays for the liquor and leaves, never to return.

After reading this short story there could be a class discussion, writing essays or preparing a debate using the relevant topics that follow.

1. Your opinion of interracial relationships.
2. Some people would like to see prostitution legalized. Would you? Why or why not?
3. Teenage pregnancy.
4. The responsibilities of parents in a situation involving a child born out of wedlock.
5. In what ways were Betsy, her mother and the child victimized by society and Clarence?

The Southern Black farmworker was in an intolerable financial situation. Countless numbers of them viewed the North as a place of bettering their condition. Spurred on by news of opportunities and favorable conditions in the North, floods, the boll weevil, and credit contracts they could never satisfy, blacks moved from the South. Jim Crow, lynchings and discrimination also gave impetus to the movement North. For the first time thousands of Black people looked to industrial work rather than landownership in their quest to enjoy the privileges of American citizenship.

Nearly one-half million Black Southerners headed north between 1915 and 1920. Many white Southerners saw the Great Migration as a direct threat to the economic system of the South. They responded to the movement by enacting laws designed to limit labor mobility, but their efforts were ineffective. By moving north, blacks destroyed the myth that they were docile, dependent and unambitious. Just migrating took aggressiveness, independence and ambition.

An appropriate novel for use at this time would be Richard Wright's *Black Boy* which is an autobiographical account of his life in the South. He suffers many indignities, but his spirit is never broken. He cannot bring himself to accept the low status, due to his race, conferred upon him by the South. He finds that he cannot live under the stifling conditions which want him to follow a certain path in life reserved for blacks only. He wants to express himself as a writer which he knows will not be accepted by his own people nor tolerated by the whites.

Richard knows that he will never realize his dream nor will he live long if he remains in the South. He makes plans to leave by working to accumulate the funds necessary for the trip. He tries some dishonest methods when tempted to do so by others, but soon realizes that the criminal way of life is not for him. He decides to work legitimately until he acquires his fare. To Richard the North symbolized freedom, life, and hope that "I might learn who I was, that I might be."

An activity that would coincide with *Black Boy* would be to have students write their own autobiographies. To keep the writing at a manageable level I would ask that the students focus their writing on a certain period in their lives or on a particular incident.

Another worthwhile assignment for students might be to research their own family histories by talking to their

parents or an older family member to find out where their family migrated from, why they decided to move to New Haven, Connecticut, and how their new life here is better or worse than the one they left behind.

At this time I would share my own family history. My paternal grandparents lived in North Carolina where my grandfather worked as a sharecropper. My grandfather had a violent dispute with the landowner over a situation concerning the farm. My grandfather knew he had been treated unfairly and also realized that he had no other recourse. He had stood up for what he saw as his rights, therefore it became difficult and somewhat dangerous for he and his family to remain on the farm. One night the whole family stealthily migrated north to Stamford, Connecticut where my grandfather later got a city construction job and my grandmother got employment at a small factory that made Cain's mayonnaise. Stamford was chosen because some relatives already lived there and my grandparents had heard through letters that it was a decent place to live and work.

Pushed by the failed cotton crops, unemployment after the collapse of the sharecropping system, increased racism, and the pull of better jobs and a better life, blacks migrated to Northern cities by the masses. In 1940 statistics revealed that over a million of the 3 million Black people in the North lived in four cities—New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit.

In the cities Black people were no longer involved in agricultural work, but were blue-collar workers in factories or service workers such as maids and janitors. Although blacks were on the lowest economical level on the Northern economic ladder, these low-status jobs were better than sharecropping. They brought higher pay, new skills, greater association with whites (which was always helpful if one was ever to enter the main stream), and participation in unions.

Urban life was lived at a faster pace and offered more freedom. Although racial segregation still existed, black life in the cities was less isolated and intimate than in the rural South. Black families seemed to grow apart.

Religious life changed and the rise of the "storefront" church represented the adoption of the rural church to city life. These churches were located in the poorest areas of the black community. Storefronts provided more intimate social contacts for the migrants than the larger city churches. Many of these churches were affiliated with holiness or spiritual sects. The churches provided the people a way of adjustment to city life. Practices such as faith healing and receiving the Holy Spirit were common in these churches and similar to practices found in the South.

A novel which would be valuable at this time would be Langston Hughes' *Tambourines to Glory*. This is the story of two Harlem women who open a storefront church when they discover that "This religious jive is something we can collect on." According to Hughes, *Tambourines to Glory* is "a fictional expose of certain ways in which religion is misused in large city communities today by various types of unscrupulous leaders who might be called 'gospel racketeers preying upon the gullibility of simple people.'"

Here are a list of questions to be used for testing purposes.

1. How do Laura and Essie improve their lives?
2. Trace the evolution of their church.
3. Describe the personalities of Essie and Laura. Use specific examples from the story to support your statements.
4. What conflicts arise in the novel?

5. Who is murdered? Why?

6. What impact does it have on the church and on the lives of the two women?

The school where I teach is located on Dixwell Avenue where there are many small churches. I would have students each identify a local church and write a report on it from material gathered during an interview with the pastor or an officer of the church. Two students could work together if they wished. I would ask that their reports be given orally.

Over the years several flamboyant religious leaders have come and gone in Harlem such as Father Divine, Prophet Jones, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad and Daddy Grace. Most of their organizations lost prominence shortly after their deaths. The only groups to survive until today are Elijah Muhammad's Black Muslims and Daddy Grace's church organization The House of Prayer for All People. I would ask students to write a report on one of these individuals and what they hoped to accomplish through their organizations. This assignment would be optional, to be done for extra credit.

While black membership in churches decreased in the urban North and while the importance of the church as the center of social life declined as it competed with other forms of entertainment, including movies, clubs and other kinds of recreation; the church still remained a key institution in the lives of many Black people. In politics, no black candidate could ever hope to win without the support of the church community.

Another extra credit optional assignment would be to have students do a research paper on Congressmen Floyd Flake, Adam Clayton Powell or Reverend Jesse Jackson. All of the students will not do these extra credit assignments, but I always try to offer students a means of improving their grade.

Urban life influenced black music. The blues usually dealt with sadness over ill treatment by a lover or the wretchedness of life in general. The blues found its roots in the rural South, but in the North the blues form remained but the words mirrored the urban condition. A new church music called gospel music was formed in the North which incorporated into black church music the sounds of jazz and the blues. Thomas A. Dorsey, the Father of Gospel Music, said the music helped "to give Black people something to lift them out of that Depression . . . out of the muck and mire of poverty and loneliness, of being broke."

This would be the time to have students listen to examples of the blues by artists such as B.B. King and Bobby Blue Bland. They would also listen to gospel music by artists such as Mahalia Jackson, James Cleveland, Edwin Hawkins and others. There is a movie on videotape, *Somebody Say Amen*, which chronicles the life of Mother Bessie Ford Smith a gospel singer who helped many famous gospel singers get their start. Students would enjoy this video because the music is great! After listening and/or viewing we would talk about the messages in the music and the conditions of life to which they speak. We would also listen in an attempt to hear any strains of the blues in gospel music or vice versa.

Black family life was affected by the movement north. Initially, the urban family retained many of the characteristics of its rural counterpart—a large number of children and more grandchildren living with

grandparents (the extended family). Since 1950 the number of husband-wife families has declined and divorces have increased. The number of female-headed households and the number of Black children living in these households has increased. Whether these developments represent the destruction of the Black family or show its ability to adapt itself to a new environment is a point much debated.

One of the novels I would use to illustrate the black urban experience would be *Jule* by George Wylie Henderson. Jule, the son of Ollie Miss, is a young man who is similar to my grandfather in that he was forced to leave his home because of a conflict with a white man. Jule strikes a white man; therefore, he must leave the South to avoid any repercussions (including death), arising from his crime. Jule goes to Harlem where for a time he gets involved in the “fast” lifestyle. After awhile, due to the superior value system he learned in rural Alabama, Jule is able to stand apart from the manipulative, materialistic, deceptive, hypocritical behaviors which surround him.

Jule has a girlfriend in Harlem, Louise (“Lou”) Davis who displays all of the previously mentioned negative characteristics. When he finally discovers that she has deceived him all along by going with other men while he worked and paid the bills, he rejects her for an unspoiled girl from Alabama. It is as if he finds true happiness when he returns to the simple life.

Another novel that I have chosen reflective of the urban experience is *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

Synopsis of Malcolm X

Malcolm Little was a dropout from school at fifteen; he was convicted of burglary and sent to prison at twenty-one. There he read many books and educated himself. While incarcerated he was converted to the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims). When he left prison in 1952, he dedicated himself to building the Black Muslims and adopted the name, Malcolm X. He withdrew from that movement in 1964, organizing first the Muslim Mosque, Inc., and later the Organization of Afro-American Unity. He made two trips to Africa and the Middle East during 1964. Three months after his return to the United States, he was assassinated in New York on February 21, 1965.

As a follow-up activity I would give students copies of Malcolm’s speech “Message to the Grass Roots” to read and discuss. ⁵ There is also a recording of this speech which might be preferable after reading a novel. The long-playing record, “Message to the Grass Roots by Malcolm X,” was published in 1965 by the Detroit-based Afro-American Broadcasting and Recording Company.

The following is a list of study questions.

1. According to Malcolm X, what serious problem does America and Black people have? Do you agree?
2. What is a revolution? Does he feel that there has been a black revolution in America? Why or why not?
3. Describe the differences between the house Negro and the field Negro.
4. How does he feel about Uncle Toms, and non-violent protests?
5. What is the Koran? Discuss some of its teachings.
5. How does the white man use the Negro leaders against the Negro revolution?
7. What are his views on the March on Washington?
8. What is his attitude toward Dr. Martin Luther King?

The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance or New Negro Movement of the 1920's was a culmination of the optimistic spirit among Northern blacks after the turn of the century. The movement was ushered in by *Shuffle Along* , a musical created by Black authors and performed by blacks; the movement ceased with the onset of the Depression. Its capital was Harlem to which Black artists and intellectuals from all over the world were attracted.

By the 1920's the black middle class was large enough to have produced an intellectual elite. The artists and writers of this group rejected the rigid middle-class standards. After World War I they began migrating to Harlem where they formed a community of intellectuals. These second-generation blacks rebelled against their parent's values, instead they sought alternate life styles and found inspiration for their art in the folk culture their elders had left behind in the South.

African art was popular among white collectors, and a new emphasis was placed on the folk and primitive aspects of the Black. When a Black writer or artist became too sophisticated, he was dropped by his white patron. There is a short story in *The Langston Hughes Reader* , "Slave on the Block" which would be good for students to read in connection with the Harlem Renaissance because it shows how whites, that is the artistic ones, adored everything that was primitive and Negro. When the white couple in the story meet the young Black man, Luther, the wife says, "He is the jungle," and the husband adds, "He's 'I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray.' "

The black middle class failed to support the New Negro in his honest reporting of the "Negro scene." Claude McKay and Langston Hughes were both condemned for presenting Black people in a way for the white world to criticize. Nevertheless, it was the common people that Hughes admired most. Their music, their dancing, their dialects and their life style inspired much of his poetry, while the pretentiousness of the Negro middle class bored him.

Although the Harlem Renaissance was primarily a literary movement, every attempt was made to discover and promote the visual arts. Aaron Douglas was the only Black artist of significance to emerge from the renaissance. His artwork was unique in that it was geometric in presentation and highly symbolic instead of being concrete and realistic.

In the book, *The Afro-American Artist* by Elsa Honig Fine, there are several examples of Douglas' work which would show on an opaque projector. ⁶

I. Illustration of "The Prodigal Son" for James Weldon Johnson's *Gods Trombones* .

II. Douglas' large-scale murals, which are on display at the Countee Cullen Branch of the New York Public Library, are concerned with the broad themes of Afro-American history.

A. The first of the four murals indicates the African cultural background of American Negroes. Dominant in it are the rhythmic arts of music, dance and sculpture. The drummers, the dancers, and the carving represent life in Africa.

B. Panel two shows the exultation following the abolition of slavery in America. Many Negro leaders emerged who are symbolized by the orator standing on a box. But soon a new oppression began in the South—the Ku Klux Klan, shown on the left of the mural concealed in their white hoods.

C. Panel three of the mural depicts a lynching. Lynching was an ever-present horror for those in the South. Ceaseless toil in the fields was the daily lot of the majority of people, but still the Negro is shown singing and dancing.

D. Panel four shows a great migration away from the clutching hand of the South to the urban industrialized life of America which began after World War I. The tall buildings symbolize the city; the central figure with the instrument symbolizes the New Negro Movement and the wheel in machinery represents the Northern industries.

For an art activity I would work along with the art teacher to have the students do some geometric and symbolic paintings similar to Aaron Douglas' work.

Lesson Plans

In this section of the curriculum unit I will present sample lessons based on the works of the Harlem Renaissance writers. From this students will gain an appreciation of the literary works of the period, and will become knowledgeable about the writers themselves. The lesson plans will basically follow this format.

There will be a short biography on each writer, then some statements about the piece to be read, a synopsis, and finally some questions and activities. The sources for the literary pieces can be found in either the teacher or the student bibliographies.

I. Zora Neale Hurston, (1903-1960), was born in Eatonville, Florida and attended Morgan College, Howard University and Barnard College. Miss Hurston received many fellowships during her lifetime for creative writing and for research in Negro folklore. Her writings include the novels *Jonah's Gourd* ; *Mules and Men* ; *Their Eyes Where Watching God*; *Moses of the Mountain* ; and *Seraph on the Suwannee* and many articles and short stories.

A. I would have the students read Hurston's short story, "The Gilded Six-Bits." ⁷ As with all stories written in dialect, I would have to give assistance in reading and understanding the text. Either the teacher or some student volunteers should read selected parts of the story aloud so that the others can hear the richness of the Southern dialect.

B. In this story Missie May almost loses her husband Joe and her good marriage when she is dazzled by the apparent wealth of Mr. Otis Slemmons, a stranger with a mouthful of gold teeth. Missie is unfaithful to Joe with this stranger and gets caught one night when Joe is dismissed from work earlier than usual. It turns out that Slemmons is just a fraud, he is not really rich; his money and his watch have been gilded to make them appear expensive.C. Questions

1. Describe the setting of the story.
2. What kind of relationship did Joe and Missie May have? Give examples from the story.
3. What did Joe regard as a sign of wealth?
4. At first, how did Joe view Slemmons? How did Missie view him?
5. Why was Missie unfaithful to Joe?
6. How did her actions affect their marriage? Give several examples?
7. Why did Missie contemplate leaving Joe? Why did she stay? Why did Joe decide to stay with Missie?

8. What irony do you see in the clerk's statement, "Wisht I could be like these darkies. Laughin' all the time. Nothin' worries 'em."

II. W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963)

Born in Massachusetts, Du Bois graduated from Fisk University in 1888 and in 1895 became the first black student to receive a Ph.D degree from Harvard University. He then taught history and economics at Atlanta University. In 1909, he helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and edited its magazine, *The Crisis* for twenty years. Du Bois was regarded by many as an important intellectual. At the time of his death, he lived in Ghana and was working as editor-in-chief of the *Encyclopedia Africana* .

A. The assigned reading will be an essay, "Of the Meaning of Progress," taken from *The Souls of Black Folk* . The essay is written in Du Bois' style of handling serious questions of black identity and pride in the same manner that a writer of fictional literature would approach his work.

B. Questions

1. What pleasures and hardships does Du Bois find in living and teaching in rural Tennessee?
2. Describe Josie's character and ambitions.
3. What did slavery and the Civil War mean to her and the other youngsters?
4. What factors destroyed her dreams?
5. What does progress mean to Du Bois?
6. In his view, what conditions are needed for progress?

III. Countee Cullen (1903-1946)

An adopted son of a Methodist minister, Countee Cullen grew up in New York City. He wrote poetry and taught French. In his writings he combines a clear understanding of the emotions of joy and sorrow as he probes the attitudes of blacks and whites toward each other.

A. "If You Should Go" by Countee Cullen is a short poem consisting of two stanzas. In these two parts of the poem the poet speaks of his love leaving and what emotion he would want to be left with when his love vanishes.

B. Discussion Questions

1. In the first stanza, what is love's leaving compared to?
2. (a) In the second stanza what does the poet mean when he says that love should leave like a dream?
(b) With what human emotion does he always want to remember his love?

IV. James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)

Although James Weldon Johnson will always be remembered as a writer, he was successful in many other fields. He taught school in his home town of Jacksonville, Florida, while studying law. After being admitted to the Florida bar in 1897, he went to New York where he wrote songs and light opera. In 1927 he published *God's Trombones*, his finest poetic achievement. The book consists of a series of seven Negro sermons in verse.

A. The class will read "The Creation" by Johnson. Since the speaker in the poem is a Black preacher, it should be read aloud. The speaker in the poem is recounting how God created the earth, the universe and man.

B. Questions

1. The speaker of the poem is a preacher. Cite images that are used to bring God close to the everyday experiences of the congregation.
2. Which lines seem to be written in Biblical language?
3. Describe the *tone* of the poem.

C. As a follow-up activity I would ask students to memorize stanzas of the poem to be recited before the class. This assignment has the potential for building self-confidence.

V. Jean Toomer (1894-1967)

Jean Toomer was born in Washington, D.C. and went to the University of Wisconsin and City College in New York. For a time he was the principal of a school in Georgia. In 1923 he published his one book, *Cane*, a mixture of poetry and poetic prose. The book was appreciated by a small audience when it was first published, but since its reissue in 1967 it has been acknowledged by more readers.

A. The class will read Jean Toomer's poem "Beehive." The speaker is a drone, a male bee, who observes the other bees freely flying in and out of the hive while he can stay only within the hive drinking the honey. He longs to be free.

B. Discussion Questions

1. Who is the speaker and what is he observing?
2. What does he wish he could do?
3. Through the image of the beehive Toomer is expressing a human emotion. What is it?

C. The students will be asked to write a one page essay on what it means to be free.

VI. Claude McKay (1890-1948)

McKay moved to the United States from the West Indies where he discovered his love for writing. He moved to New York, settled in Harlem and began publishing his poems in small literary magazines. In 1922 his most important collection of poetry, *Harlem Shadows*, was published. His writing is noted for three factors: his sensitive portrayals of black life, for his nostalgia for the tropics of his youth and for his demands for unity among blacks in attacking social injustice.

A. In the poem, "If We Must Die," McKay incites his people to action, strongly cautioning them against complacency in their fight against injustice.

B. Questions

1. Against what threat is the poet rallying his people?
2. Why doesn't the poet name the dangers?
3. What emotions does McKay want to arouse in the reader?
4. Do you think that this poem is effective as protest art? Why or why not?

Notes

1. "Southern Blacks/Northern Blacks: Is There A Difference," in *Ebony* , 56.
2. Ibid.
3. Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress* , 161.
4. Langston Hughes, "The Red-Headed Baby," in *The Langston Hughes Reader* , 18-22.
5. Malcolm X, "Message to the Grass Roots," in *Malcolm X Speaks* , 3-17.
6. Elsa Honig Fine, *The Afro - American Artist* , 86-87.
7. Zora Neale Hurston, "The Gilded Six-Bits," in *The Best Stories Stories by Negro Writers* , 74-85.

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Richard Wright's life growing up in the South as a "black boy."

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Hughes, Langston. *The Langston Hughes Reader* . New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1958. This is a compilation of this prolific writer's novels, stories, plays, poems, songs and essays.

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X, Malcolm. "Message to the Grass Roots." In *Malcolm X Speaks*, edited by George Breitman, 3-17. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965. A stirring speech given by Malcolm in 1963 at the Detroit Council for Human Rights. This is one of the last speeches he gave before his split with Elijah Muhammed and the Black Muslims.

Field Trips

1. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

121 Wall Street

New Haven, Connecticut

The library has the James Weldon Johnson Collection which contains the papers of Harlem Renaissance writers Johnson, Du Bois, Cullen, Hurston, Hughes, McKay, Toomer and Wright.

2. The Yale Art Gallery

Chapel Street

New Haven, Connecticut

This would be a place to see works of Harlem Renaissance artists and photographs of Harlem and its people during the renaissance.

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