



Yale-New Haven  
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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1997 Volume V: The Blues Impulse

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## **The Visual Blues of Jacob Lawrence, Aaron Douglas and Romare Bearden**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 97.05.02  
by Val-Jean Belton

The majority of Blues music that we hear is a reflection of one's everyday life. There are many blues interpretations that are represented in music, literature and visual art. Black writers, jazz and blues musicians, and visual artists emerged from or flocked to Harlem from 1919 through 1929. This manifestation was the start of the Harlem Renaissance. Various painters and sculptors joined fellow poets, novelists, and musicians to create a collaboration that would be forever remembered in History. Some of these visual artists during the period of the Harlem Manifestation included Aaron Douglas, Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, William Johnson, Alain Lock, Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston and Elizabeth Catlett. Therefore, as an art teacher, I designed this unit to focus on the art of Aaron Douglas, Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden and how their artistic works are a visual Blues of the African American people.

The focal points of this unit will include how these artists' works were influenced a great deal by the Harlem Renaissance and their own personal lives. This unit begins with a historical view of Jacob Lawrence, then a brief view of Aaron Douglas and his study of African aesthetics. It concludes with the art of Romare Bearden and how the mood of his collages are similar to that of a blues musician. This unit is intended for grades seven through ten. It can also be adapted to include students who are in special education and bilingual education programs. This unit also contains various visual aids, related vocabulary, and artistic lesson plans.

(Recommended for Art, grades 7- 10)

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