TEACHER'S GUIDE
PRIMARY SOURCE SET

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
TEACHING with PRIMARY SOURCES

The Harlem Renaissance

A tremendous explosion of creativity rocked the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, and it took the name of the New York City neighborhood of Harlem.

Portrait of Paul Robeson
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004663510/

Historical Background

The Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Movement, was a period of great cultural activity and innovation among African American artists and writers, one that saw new artists and landmark works appear in the fields of literature, dance, art, and music. The participants were all fiercely individualistic talents, and not all of them saw themselves as being part of a movement. But in time writers such as Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes; painters like Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden; and musicians and composers such as Duke Ellington and Bessie Smith became widely known as members of the Harlem Renaissance.

Much of the foundation of the Harlem Renaissance was laid by earlier generations of African American educators, students, and intellectuals. In the decades following the Civil War, many racial barriers to education were removed, and African Americans took advantage of the new educational opportunities in great numbers. Dozens of African American colleges and universities were founded, and African American professors and other intellectuals took increasingly public roles. By the early 1900s, intellectual leaders like W.E.B. DuBois and James Weldon Johnson were writing, lecturing, and being published in journals such as *Crisis* and *The Messenger*.

At the same time, African Americans were moving in huge numbers from the South to northern industrial cities, like New York, where they could find work and escape some of the institutionalized discrimination and mistreatment caused by the South's Jim Crow laws. Innovative young African American writers, painters, and musicians began gathering in a number of neighborhoods in Manhattan, including Harlem and Greenwich Village, working together and developing new ideas, and in the years after World War I they gained national attention.

Some of the most prominent works created during the Harlem Renaissance were in the field of literature.

Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and Langston Hughes produced novels, poetry, short stories and memoirs.

Claude McKay
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/92512415/

Hurston produced important work in a number of fields. An anthropologist and folklorist, she studied with the eminent anthropologist Franz Boaz at Columbia University, and used the music and stories that she collected as a folklorist to inform her novels, plays, and other books, including *Mules and Men* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She also performed music based on her folkloric research, and has left a number of recordings along with her manuscripts.

Langston Hughes
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94506949/

Langston Hughes, best known as a poet, also wrote plays, a novel, short stories, and an autobiography. Many of his poems were set to music by African American composers, and he collaborated with Zora Neale Hurston on a play, *Mule Bone*. This primary source set includes a poem written by Hughes, as well as a page of a song based on one of his early works, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers."

Another artist who achieved great things in a number of fields was the multitalented Paul Robeson. An honor student and All-American athlete while at Rutgers University, Robeson went on to graduate from Columbia University Law School, and soon after became a famed concert singer, recording artist, stage and film actor. He was an impassioned advocate of political causes, and his performance tours and activism took him around the world.

Harlem was a center for musical and theatrical performance as well as literary work, as musicians drawn by the neighborhood's nightlife collaborated with writers, artists, and each other to create original works. Some of this work drew on musical forms that had grown from the African American experience—gospel, jazz, and blues. Other African American musicians worked in classical forms. Bessie Smith was a legendary blues singer, Marian Anderson broke ground as a classical contralto, and Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington took jazz to new levels of innovation.

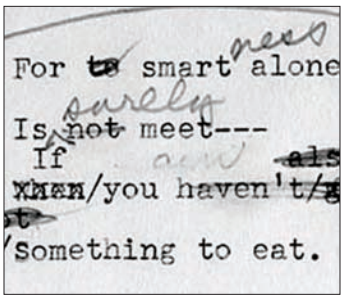
Eubie Blake was a prolific composer of the Harlem Renaissance, and was one of the creators of the musical revue *Shuffle Along*. This show was written and produced by African Americans, opened in New York in 1921 to great success, ran for one year in New York, and then toured for an additional two years.

The visual arts also were part of the Harlem Renaissance. Among the best-known artists of the period were Aaron Douglas, Laura Wheeler Waring, Edward Harleston, and the painter and collage artist Jacob Lawrence.

[Untitled] by Aaron Hughes
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006682520/

Suggestions for Teachers

Ask students to examine the newspaper pages. How do they convey connections between the African American community in New York City—the principal setting of the Harlem Renaissance—and African Americans in other areas? What is the importance of these connections?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/you haven't
Something to eat.

Draft of Langston Hughes's poem, "The Ballad of Booker T."
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(mcc/024))

Multiple drafts of Langston Hughes' poem "The Ballad of Booker T" offer opportunities to explore not only the writing process, but also the poet's thinking process. Compare two drafts and consider the changes that Hughes made; compare an early draft to the final copy. How did the changes he made shape the effect of the poem? What do the changes and his other notations reveal about his thinking and writing processes? Students can apply what they learn about revisions to their own work: ask them to write a descriptive paragraph or a short poem and then revise it over several days, dating each version.

Read "The Whites Invade Harlem" and consider what point Levi Huber is making. After students read the entire document, direct them to focus on a single paragraph and analyze the techniques the writer uses to make his point. Why might he have taken that approach? Students may apply the techniques to their own writing about a current artistic or cultural phenomenon.

Students may study the four photographs taken by Carl Van Vechten and analyze his style and artistic choices. What qualities or characteristics of each subject was he emphasizing? How did he use poses, backgrounds, props and focus to create the overall impression? Students might search the Library of Congress digital collections to find photographs by other photographers of the people Van Vechten photographed, and compare the choices those photographers made with those Van Vechten made. Students might also select a few people in the school and experiment with portrait photography. They should be prepared to discuss the choices they made in setting up and taking the photographs.

Ask students to examine the documents related to Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Eubie Blake. Have students look for connections with African American culture in the years preceding the twentieth century. Ask students to consider subject matter and writing/musical style. What is the significance of these connections? Have students find more information about the music of the artists portrayed in photographs—Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, and Marian Anderson. How does their work compare to music composed or performed by African Americans in earlier eras?

Portrait of Marian Anderson
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004662516/

Additional Resources

Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers

http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/

Creative Americans: Portraits by Carl Van Vechten 1932-1964

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/vanvechten/index.html

The Zora Neale Hurston Plays at the Library of Congress

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/hurston/

William P. Gottlieb: Photographs from the Golden Age of Jazz

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wghtml/wghome.html

Primary Sources with Citations

Van Vechten, Carl, photographer. "Portrait of Paul Robeson." Photograph. June 1, 1933. From Library of Congress: *Van Vechten Collection*.
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Van Vechten, Carl, photographer. "Portrait of Zora Neale Hurston." April 3, 1938. Photograph. From Library of Congress: *Van Vechten Collection*.
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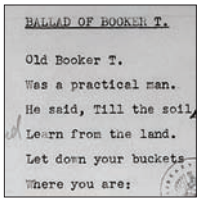

BALLAD OF BOOKER T.

Old Booker T.
Was a practical man.
He said, Till the soil,
Learn from the land.
Let down your buckets
Where you are:

Hughes, Langston. "Drafts of Langston Hughes's Poem 'Ballad of Booker T.' Poem in manuscript. May 30-June 1, 1941. From Library of Congress: *Words and Deeds in American History: Selected Documents Celebrating the Manuscript Division's First 100 Years*.
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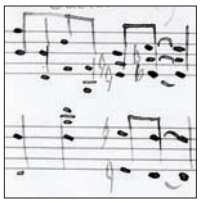

Blake, Eubie. "Charleston Rag." Composer's manuscript. circa 1917. From Library of Congress: *Prints and Photographs Online Catalog*.
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Gottlieb, William P., photographer. "Portrait of Louis Armstrong, between 1938 and 1948." Photograph. From Library of Congress: Performing Arts Encyclopedia.
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THE PAN-AFRICAN CONGRESS.

By W. E. BURGHARDT DU BOIS.
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ed fact. It was held February 19,
1919, at the Grand Hotel, Boulevard
ucines, Paris. The Executive Comm
consisted of M. Blaise Diagne, Preside
W. E. Burghardt DuBois, Secreta
. Ida Gibbs Hunt, Assistant Secreta
M. E. F. Fredericks. The Congr
ntained an office at the Hotel de Ma
Rue Richelieu, with office hours fr
a. m. to 6 p. m.
ifty-seven delegates, including a num
native Africans educated abroad, w

DuBois, W. E. Burghardt. "The Pan-African Congress." Cayton's Weekly 3, no. 46 (April 19, 1919), images 3 and 4. From Library of Congress: *Chronicling America*: Historic American Newspapers.
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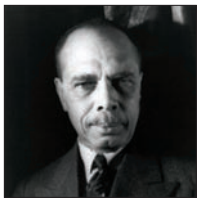

Van Vechten, Carl, photographer. "Portrait of James Weldon Johnson." Photograph. December 3, 1932. From Library of Congress: *Van Vechten Collection*.
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"Look Who Is Coming to Seattle." Advertisement. *Cayton's Weekly* 3, no. 52 (May 31, 1919), image 2. From Library of Congress: *Chronicling America*: Historic American Newspapers.
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WELDON JOHNSON
LENGES GOVEI

He Points Out That
Seek to Hide Facts
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(A. N. P. Ser
New York, N. Y.,

"Weldon Johnson Challenges Government's Veracity." *The Tulsa Star* 10, no. 28 (October 9, 1920): 5. From Library of Congress: *Chronicling America*: Historic American Newspapers.
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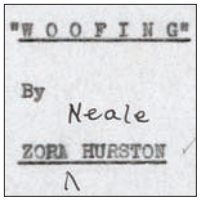

"W O O F I N G"

By
Neale
ZORA HURSTON

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Woofing*. Script. Registered for copyright July 1931. From Library of Congress: *The Zora Neale Hurston Plays at the Library of Congress*.
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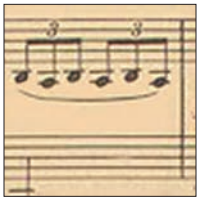

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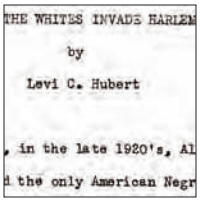
THE WHITES INVADE HARLEM
by
Levi C. Hubert
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d the only American Negr

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