



Ethnic Studies Lesson 4G: African Americans and the Harlem Renaissance

TOPIC:

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

GRADE LEVELS:

11-12

TIME:

1½ HOURS

California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

Themes:

1. Identity
2. History and Movement

Values and Principles:

1. Cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).
2. Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by providing a space to share their stories of success, community collaboration, and solidarity, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth.

California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)**

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem. (RI.11-12.7)

Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**History—Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)**

Analyze the role of cultural movements, such as the Harlem Renaissance, in challenging stereotypes and promoting social change. (11.5)

Lesson Purpose

Students will investigate the music, art, and literature of the Harlem Renaissance and its contribution to breaking down African American stereotypes.

Essential Questions

Who were the artists of the Harlem Renaissance? How did the music, art, and literature of the Harlem Renaissance contribute to the breaking down of African American stereotypes?

How has life changed for African Americans in the last 250 years?

Materials

[PBS NewsHour: The Harlem Renaissance's cultural explosion, in photographs](#)

[Unit 4 KWL Chart](#)

Vocabulary

stereotype

Harlem Renaissance

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, ask students what a stereotype is. Ask how Jim Crow served as a negative stereotype of African Americans from the South. What other stereotypes might have been formed of African Americans during the early 20th century? What do students already know about the Harlem Renaissance? Have students watch [PBS NewsHour: The Harlem Renaissance's cultural explosion, in photographs](#). Ask students to take notes while they watch how the Harlem Renaissance broke down African American stereotypes. Make sure that students see the connection between the Great Migration north and the influx of African Americans to urban New York. As a class, have students share their thoughts when the video is over.

Step 2:

- Let students know that over the next two lessons they will create a classroom gallery of art, literature, and music that broke stereotypes. What would they like to call their gallery? In pairs or groups of three, have students select one of the topics below. Make sure students know that this is just a sample. There were many more artists in Harlem from 1910 to 1930. They will create an exhibit and be the spokesperson for that exhibit when it is presented. They can select their own educational websites and the best way to showcase their topic. Students may also want to visit the school library to find original books, poem anthologies, or children's books based on poems (There are several for Langston Hughes: *I, Too*, *Sing America*; *Mother to Son*; *Carol of the Brown King*; *An Earth Song*, *Sail Away*; etc.) Students will need to carefully cite their sources in their presentations.

Langston Hughes	Aaron Douglas
W. E. B. Du Bois	James Van Der Zee
Claude McKay	Archibald John Motley Jr.
Zora Neale Hurston	James Weldon Johnson
Jacob Lawrence	Dorothy West
Augusta Savage	Jean Toomer
Countee Cullen	

Step 3:

- As a class, when time is running low, let students know you will continue the gallery in the next lesson with the addition of musicians. Any work that is left incomplete can be finished as part of that lesson. Students will have an opportunity to present their gallery after the next lesson.

Step 4:

- As a class, ask students this lesson's questions, "How did the music, art, and literature of the Harlem Renaissance contribute to the breaking down of African American stereotypes?" and "How did the Harlem Renaissance aid in African American identity formation?" Also ask this unit's question, "How has life changed for African Americans over the last 250 years?" Write down what was learned on this unit's KWL chart.

Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

As time permits, and for homework, have students listen to [Beinecke Library: Claude McKay: "America"](#) and [Langston Hughes, I Too](#). Ask students to write a short paragraph and answer, "Why would Harlem Renaissance artists 'love this cultured hell that tests my youth'? What are some reasons why, after almost three centuries (by the 1920s) of discrimination and racism, these African Americans might still love America?"

Additional Readings and Resources

[Beinecke Library: Claude McKay: "America"](#)

Beito, David T., and Linda Royster Beito. "Isabel Paterson, Rose Wilder Lane, and Zora Neale Hurston on War, Race, the State, and Liberty." *The Independent Review* 12, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 553-573. https://www.independent.org/pdf/tir/tir_12_04_4_beito.pdf

Ebeling, Richard M. "George S. Schuyler, Anti-Racist Champion of Liberty." American Institute for Economic Research, August 19, 2019.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *You Don't Know Us Negroes and Other Essays*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates and Genevieve West. Harper Collins, 2022.

Jackson, Lauren Michele. "The Zora Neale Hurston We Don't Talk About." *The New Yorker*, February 14, 2022.

Judge, Mark Gauvreau. "Justice to George S. Schuyler." Hoover Institution, August 1, 2000. <https://www.hoover.org/research/justice-george-s-schuyler>

[Langston Hughes, I Too](#)

[National Gallery of Art, Harlem Renaissance](#)

[National Museum of African American History & Culture: A New African American Identity: The Harlem Renaissance](#)

[The Phillips Collection, The Artists of the Harlem Renaissance](#)

Reed, Ishmael, and Steve Cannon, “George S. Schuyler Interview.” *Yardbird Reader*, vol. 2. 1973, 83-104.

Reprinted in Reed, *Shrovetide in Old New Orleans*, Doubleday, 1978, and in Schuyler, George S., *Rac(e)ing to the Right: Selected Essays of George S. Schuyler*, University of Tennessee Press, 2001.

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America: A History*. Basic Books, 1981, 183-224.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES: America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

Ethnic Studies 4A: KWL Chart

KNOW	WONDER	LEARNED
<i>What do we think we already know about this topic?</i>	<i>What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.</i>	<i>After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.</i>