

ProQuest Learning: Literature Example Lesson Plan

Topic: The Harlem Renaissance

Grade Levels: High School

Subjects: American Literature; American History

Standards: *NCTE English Language Arts Standards 1, 3, 6 and 9*
NCHS National History Standards for US History 3C
National Standards for Art Education Content Standards 3 and 4

Description: After initial readings in the background history of the movement, the student will explore the concept of 'Africa' and its relationship to the 'New Negro' in selected resources from the Harlem Renaissance. The student will analyze selected poetry and prose of the Harlem Renaissance, to explore how language is used to convey this central relationship. The student will also examine a selection of the literature in its original (primary source) setting to further her understanding of the social and political implications of this concept.

Objectives:

Language Arts

- ? Understand the relationship between literature and its historical period.
- ? Use the tools of critical reading and the perspectives of literary criticism to analyze and evaluate literary texts.
- ? Identify and understand the symbols used in literary texts.

History

- ? Understand the impact of African American culture on American society in the 1920s.
- ? Understand the impact of economic forces on the social and cultural life of African American society in the 1920s.
- ? Analyze the motives, interests and biases expressed in primary sources.

Procedure:

1. Understanding the background history of the Harlem Renaissance.

Day One

- ? Introduce the Harlem Renaissance to the students, emphasizing the creative energy of the movement. Together, look at the 'Harlem Renaissance' entry in the *Glossary of Literary Terms*.
- ? Discuss the geographic location of the Harlem Renaissance, its relationship to the Great Migration, and its focus on ethnic pride and Africa as the cultural homeland for African Americans.

Day Two

- ? Ask the students to perform a search in bigchalk or eLibrary on the terms "*Harlem Renaissance*" AND *Africa*. Instruct them to limit the search to book sources only, in order to gather reference sources.
- ? Working in groups, have the students create lists of the major characteristics of the movement and of its important writers. Have them brainstorm brief observations on the importance of the Harlem Renaissance in American literature and African American history. Share these materials with the class.
- ? In a whole class discussion, ask the students to speculate on why this literature might have Africa as a common subject.

2. Exploring the literature of the Harlem Renaissance.

Day Three

- ? Have the students conduct an advanced search in the Author Search on the literary movement, *Harlem Renaissance*. Suggest they add any names that are not already on their lists of important writers.
- ? Instruct the students to mark those writers who have texts available within the database.

- ? Instruct the students in how to conduct a series of searches in the Search Texts screen of ProQuest Learning: Literature for the word *Africa* in the text and each of the marked authors in turn. Ask them to explain why a search for a word in text was an efficient way to identify this group of poems.
- ? Have the students read a selection of the poems identified.

Assignment:

- ? Ask each student to make a reading journal entry for each of the poems, responding to the following questions:
 - ? What is the tone of the poem?
 - ? What emotions are expressed by the poet/narrator?
 - ? What kind of language is used in describing Africa? Note several examples from the text.
 - ? What characteristics does the poet ascribe to Africa?
 - ? Does the author create a relationship between the history of Africa and African Americans? Describe the relationship and note examples from the text.

Day Four

- ? Have students share reading journal entries for each of the poems.
- ? As a class, draw and develop a web of relationships between the concept of Africa and African Americans, incorporating the material from the journal entries.

3. The text as primary source—looking at the literature in its original context.**Day Five**

- ? Have the students go to the following website: <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/harlem/>. This web site contains a facsimile of a special issue of *Survey Graphic* magazine edited by Alain Locke and designed to highlight the African-American ‘Renaissance’ of Harlem. Click ‘Contents of the *Survey Graphic* Harlem Number’ link to access the facsimile.
- ? Allow the students to spend some time exploring the contents. Ask them to share their observations on the purpose of the issue and its contents.
- ? In a whole class discussion, ask the class to construct a definition of the ‘New Negro’ after looking at the Locke work, “Enter the New Negro.”

Day Six

- ? Have the students read the article “The Art of the Ancestors,” and look at the images in the article. (The facsimiles of the original pages are on the right, and can be enlarged.) Ask each student to make an entry in her journal on this article, responding to the following questions:
 - ? What emotions does each sculpture call up in you?
 - ? How are they alike? How are they different?
 - ? Why has the author titled this article “The Art of the Ancestors”?
- ? Have the students read Countee Cullen’s poem, “Heritage” in facsimile. In a class discussion, examine not only the relationship between the narrator and Africa, but also how that relationship is extended in the images that accompany the poem.

Assignment/Assessment:

- ? Have each student write a review of the Harlem issue of *Survey Graphic*. Using her notes on the background of the movement, her reading journal entries and class notes, she should respond to the following topics in the review:
 - ? What was the purpose of the issue?
 - ? Was the issue successful in achieving its purpose? Why or why not?
 - ? Explore how the concept of Africa was developed in the issue. (Use examples.) How does it compare to the Africa of other poems we have read?
 - ? Why do you think the vision of the African homeland was such a powerful ingredient in the work of African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance?

Abbreviated Lesson: The lesson plan may be abbreviated by concluding at the close of the fourth day.