

The Harlem Renaissance Project

“From 1920 until about 1930 an unprecedented outburst of creative activity among African-Americans occurred in all fields of art. Beginning as a series of literary discussions in the lower Manhattan (Greenwich Village) and upper Manhattan (Harlem) sections of New York City, this African-American cultural movement became known as “The New Negro Movement” and later as the Harlem Renaissance. More than a literary movement and more than a social revolt against racism, the Harlem Renaissance exalted the unique culture of African-Americans and redefined African-American expression. African-Americans were encouraged to celebrate their heritage and to become “The New Negro,” a term coined in 1925 by sociologist and critic Alain LeRoy Locke.

One of the factors contributing to the rise of the Harlem Renaissance was the great migration of African-Americans to northern cities (such as New York City, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.) between 1919 and 1926. In his influential book *The New Negro* (1925), Locke described the northward migration of blacks as “something like a spiritual emancipation.” Black urban migration, combined with trends in American society as a whole toward experimentation during the 1920s, and the rise of radical black intellectuals – including Locke, Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and W. E. B. Du Bois, editor of *The Crisis* magazine – all contributed to the particular styles and unprecedented success of black artists during the Harlem Renaissance period.”

Many believe the Harlem Renaissance probably realized its foundation in the works of W.E. B. Du Bois, since he believed that an educated Black elite should lead Blacks to liberation. He further believed that his people could not achieve social equality by emulating white ideals; he felt that equality could be achieved only by teaching Black racial pride with an emphasis on an African cultural heritage.

Although the Renaissance was not a school, the writers associated with it had a common bond: they dealt with Black life from a Black perspective. While the Renaissance is often thought of as solely a literary movement, some historians of the period also include artists and musicians.

THE PROJECT:

Your task is to thoroughly research a writer or an artist of the Harlem Renaissance. You must consult a minimum of four sources, two of which can be from the Internet. Your final project will include a works cited page. After you have researched, you will write a critical analysis of that author/artist/musician’s style and message. The culmination of this project will be twofold: a presentation to the class, for which you will design a poster that represents your individual’s significant life events, and your written analysis, in which you will critique the individual’s work and philosophy of writing, music, or art.

If you choose an author, you should read at least 7 poems or two short stories that represent the author's work, and you will choose an appropriate selection to share with the class. You may read a novel, if you desire, but check with me first.

If you choose a musician, you must research the music and lyrics of at least five songs, and you should be prepared to share one song with the class during your presentation. You will need to be aware of critics' views of this musician as well.

If you choose an artist, you must research at least five works of art that display the artist's style and technique, and you should have examples to show the class during your presentation. You will need to be aware of critics' views of the artwork as well. **See me if you have other ideas for an individual to research!

Authors:

Langston Hughes
Countee Cullen
Angelina W. Grimke
Jessie Redmon Fauset
James Weldon Johnson
Nella Larsen
Zora Neale Hurston
Marion Vera Cuthbert
Jean Toomer
Gwendolyn B. Bennett
Ida B. Wells-Barnett
Arna Bontemps
Alice Dunbar Nelson
Claude McKay
Esther Popel
Anne Spencer
Richard Wright
Rudolph Fisher
Sterling Brown

Artists:

Jacobs Lawrence
Aaron Douglas
Romare Bearden
Lois Mailou Jones
William H. Johnson

Musicians:

Duke Ellington
Billie Holiday
Pearl Bailey
Ella Fitzgerald