Learning Targets

- Make inferences from texts, using guided research questions.
- Identify the philosophy, values, and beliefs of the Harlem Renaissance, and write an explanatory text to articulate your understanding.

Historical Context

Understanding the historical context of a literary work can be essential to understanding the text. For example, understanding the historical context of McCarthyism in America provides essential background knowledge for the reader to fully comprehend Arthur Miller’s social commentary in The Crucible. When researching a literary period like the Harlem Renaissance, it is important to draw information from both primary and secondary sources to support your understanding. As you study the works included in this activity, try to answer the following guiding questions based on the information that you can glean from each text. Answers to these questions will help you begin researching for information to be delivered as you complete Embedded Assessment 1.

To understand the historical context of a literary work, it is important that you study it from several angles.

Possible Research Questions

- What is the time period and what were the historical events that influenced this time period?
  - How does the historical context influence the writing and artwork from the period?
  - What was daily life like for the ordinary citizens?

- What were the philosophy and beliefs of the people who influenced and were influenced by this period?
  - Do they have an optimistic or pessimistic view of life?
  - What is their view of society?
  - What is their view of education?

- How do the dominant genres produced during this time reflect its values?
  - How did the historical period affect the arts and beliefs of the literary movement?
  - How did the creators—the artists and the politicians—influence the events of the time period?

- Who are the significant authors and works that most represent the time period?
- How do those works exemplify the time period?
The Historical Context of the Harlem Renaissance

Conducting Research
During this part of the unit, you teacher will assign you to groups to research and analyze information about the Harlem Renaissance. You will be viewing and reading primary sources.

1. Your class will next view a documentary film together. Then your teacher will assign your discussion group one set of additional sources to investigate. Mark the text for evidence that helps you infer information, and then take notes on the graphic organizer on page 357. If you are assigned the artwork, your cooperative group should share the artwork, noting textual evidence from the art and explaining what this information tells you about the Harlem Renaissance. For the reading of the visual text, consider using the OPTIC strategy.

PRIMARY SOURCE 1: DOCUMENTARY FILM
You will begin building understanding of the Harlem Renaissance by watching a segment of a film that your teacher will share with you. Your purpose for watching this film is to help you answer Essential Question 1: How do cultural movements such as the Harlem Renaissance affect people’s attitudes and beliefs? Take notes on this film and the rest of the research sources provided.

PRIMARY SOURCES 2: ART
Your group’s research will focus on the art created during the Harlem Renaissance. Descriptions of primary artists follow, but you may also choose to add others to this list.

About the Artist: Augusta Savage
Augusta Savage (1892–1962)—artist, activist, and educator—was born in Green Cove Springs, Florida. An important African-American artist, Savage began making art as a child, using the natural clay found in her community. She liked to sculpt animals and other small figures. But her father, a Methodist minister, did not approve of this activity, and did whatever he could to stop her. Savage once said that her father “almost whipped all the art out of me.”

Art to Research: Lift Every Voice and Sing, Sculpture by Augusta Savage

About the Artist: Lois Mailou Jones
In the 1930s, the art of Lois Mailou Jones (1905–1998) reflected the influences of African traditions. She designed African-style masks and in 1938 painted Les Fétiches, which depicts masks in five distinct, ethnic styles. During a year in Paris, she produced landscapes and figure studies, but African influences reemerged in her art in the late 1960s and early ’70s, particularly after two tours of Africa.

Art to Research: Les Fétiches by Lois Mailou Jones, 1938
In Norwegian mythology, the norns are female beings who rule the destiny of gods and men. They are comparable to the Greek mythological Fates who watched that the fate assigned to every being by eternal laws might take its course without obstruction.
ACTIVITY 5.3 continued

The Historical Context of the Harlem Renaissance

4 The tide of Negro migration, northward and city-ward, is not to be fully explained as a blind flood started by the demands of war industry coupled with the shutting off of foreign migration, or by the pressure of poor crops coupled with increased social terrorism in certain sections of the South and Southwest. Neither labor demand, the bollweevil, nor the Ku Klux Klan is a basic factor however contributory any or all of them may have been. The wash and rush of this human tide on the beach line of the northern city centers is to be explained primarily in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize, even in the face of an extortionate and heavy toil, a chance for the improvement of conditions. With each successive wave of it, the movement of the Negro becomes more and more a mass movement toward the larger and the more democratic chance—in the Negro’s case a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern.

5 Take Harlem as an instance of this. Here in Manhattan is not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. It has attracted the African, the West Indian, the Negro American; has brought together the Negro of the North and the Negro of the South; the man from the city and the man from the town and village; the peasant, the student, the business man, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast. Each group has come with its own separate motives and for its own special ends, but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another. Proscription and prejudice have thrown these dissimilar elements into a common area of contact and interaction. Within this area, race sympathy and unity have determined a further fusing of sentiment and experience. So what began in terms of segregation becomes more and more, as its elements mix and react, the laboratory of a great racewelding. Hitherto, it must be admitted that American Negroes have been a race more in name than in fact, or to be exact, more in sentiment than in experience. The chief bond between them has been that of a common condition rather than a common consciousness; a problem in common rather than a life in common. In Harlem, Negro life is seizing upon its first chances for group expression and self-determination. It is—or promises at least to be—a race capital. That is why our comparison is taken with those nascent centers of folk-expression and self-determination which are playing a creative part in the world to-day. Without pretense to their political significance, Harlem has the same role to play for the New Negro as Dublin has had for the New Ireland or Prague for the New Czechoslovakia.

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS
How could the historical context described in the text influence the writing and artwork from the period?

WORD CONNECTIONS

Word Meanings
Three words in this text that may be unfamiliar to you are extortionate, proscription, and nascent. The word extortionate is an adjective that means “excessive, harsh, or unreasonable.” Proscription (noun) refers to a legal restraint or restriction. Nascent (adjective) means “beginning, emergent, or budding.”

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS
Locke speaks of something he calls “racewelding.” How does he define this as the positive outcome of living in Harlem?
PRIMARY SOURCE 4: POETRY AND MUSIC

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Gwendolyn B. Bennett (1902–1981) was an African-American writer who contributed to *Opportunity*, a magazine that chronicled cultural advancements in Harlem. Though often overlooked, she was an accomplished writer in poetry and prose. Her heritage is a main theme in her poetry, and her works reflect the shared themes and motifs of the Harlem Renaissance. Racial pride, rediscovery of Africa, recognition of African music, and dance are common themes in Bennett’s works. Bennett read the following poem on March 21, 1924, at a gathering of writers. Some historians say that this night was the official beginning of the Harlem Renaissance.

To Usward

*by Gwendolyn B. Bennett (1924)*

Let us be still
As ginger jars are still
Upon a Chinese shelf.
By entities of Self... . . .

5 Not still with lethargy and sloth,
But quiet with the pushing of our growth.
Not self-contained with smug identity
But conscious of the strength in entity.
If any have a song to sing

That’s different from the rest,
Oh let them sing
Before the urgency of Youth's behest!
For some of us have songs to sing
Of jungle heat and fires,

15 And some of us are solemn grown
With pitiful desires,
And there are those who feel the pull
Of seas beneath the skies,
And some there be who want to croon

Of Negro lullabies.
We claim no part with racial dearth;
We want to sing the songs of birth!
And so we stand like ginger jars
Like ginger jars bound round

20 With dust and age;
Like jars of ginger we are sealed
By nature's heritage.
But let us break the seal of years
With pungent thrusts of song,

30 For there is joy in long-dried tears
For whetted passions of a throng.

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Does this poem reflect an optimistic or pessimistic view of life?

WORD CONNECTIONS

*Roots and Affixes*

The word *entity* comes from the Medieval Latin *entitas*, which is from the Latin *ens*, *ent-* (meaning “being,” which is from *esse*, “be”). The suffix *-ity* means a “quality or state.” Other words using this suffix include nonentity and identity.

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Why was Bennett’s poem considered “the rallying cry for the new Negro” at the time?

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Does this poem reflect an optimistic or pessimistic view of life?
The Historical Context of the Harlem Renaissance

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
James Weldon Johnson (June 17, 1871–June 26, 1938) was an American author, politician, diplomat, critic, journalist, poet, anthologist, educator, lawyer, songwriter, and early civil rights activist. Johnson is remembered best for his leadership within the NAACP, as well as for his writing, which includes novels, poems, and collections of folklore. He was also one of the first African-American professors at New York University. Later in life he was a professor of creative literature and writing at Fisk University.

Lift Every Voice and Sing
by James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won.
Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.
God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand.
True to our God,
True to our native land.

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS
This poem has become the hymn to the beliefs and philosophy of the Harlem Renaissance. What key belief of the Harlem Renaissance do you identify in this poem?
关于作者


文学批评

摘自“From the Dark Tower”

by Eugenia W. Collier

College Language Association Journal 11.1 (1967)

1. 似乎一首表达哈莱姆文艺复兴时期诗歌精神的诗是“From the Dark Tower”，由Cullen创作。这是一首克制、庄重、感伤的作品，受Keats和Shelley的影响，而不是现代主义的影响。

2. 顺便说一句，The Dark Tower实际上是指哈莱姆136街的一座建筑，许多诗人常到那里聚会。Cullen知道他在为别人说话，当他说道：

   我们不仅要播种，也要收割
   金色的果实会自然成长
   不能总是忍受别人的侮辱
   我们不总是弯腰给更复杂的野兽
   我们不是永恒哭泣的
   夜空以其深色的胸脯宽慰空虚的
   白星在黑暗中一样美丽
   有些花不会在光中绽放
   用略带愧意和悲痛
   隐藏我们痛苦的心
   我们会照顾心碎的种子

3. 让我们来探讨诗中的象征意义。我们常使用的播种-收获的象征，自然事物的希望最终实现，或者“应得的报应”最终得到。播种-收获的象征有效地表达了因历史背景而产生的愤慨。
falls to the individual or group of people caught in an unjust system. The image of a person planting the seeds of his labor, knowing even as he plants that “others” will pluck the fruit, is a picture of the frustration which is so often the Negro’s lot. The image necessarily (and perhaps unconsciously) implies certain questions: What must be the feelings of the one who plants? How long will he continue to plant without reward? Will he not eventually stop planting, or perhaps begin seizing the fruit which is rightfully his? In what light does he see himself? How does he regard the “others” who “reap the golden increment of bursting fruit”? What physical and emotional damage results to the laborer from this arrangement to which obviously he never consented?

4 In his basic symbol then, Cullen expresses the crux of the protest poem which so flourished in the Harlem Renaissance. In poem after poem, articulate young Negroes answered these questions or asked them again, these questions and many more. And in the asking, and in the answering, they were speaking of the old, well-worn (though never quite realized) American ideals.

5 In the octave¹ of the poem, Cullen answers some of these questions. The grim promise “not always” tolls ominously like an iron bell through the first eight lines. “We shall not always plant while others reap,” he promises. By degrees he probes deeper and deeper into the actual meaning of the image. In the next two lines he points out one of many strange paradoxes of social injustice: that the “abject and mute” victim must permit himself to be considered inferior by “lesser men”—that is, men who have lost a measure of their humanity because they have degraded their brothers. This image is a statement of a loss of human values—the “abject and mute” victim of an unjust social system, bereft of spirit, silently serving another who has himself suffered a different kind of loss in robbing his fellow man of his potential—that is, the fruit of his seed. Perhaps this destruction of the human spirit is the “more subtle brute” of which the poet speaks. The last line of the octave promises eventual change in the words, “We were not made eternally to weep.” Yet it implies that relief is still a long way off. It is in the sestet² that the poem itself blossoms into full-blown dark beauty. With the skill of an impressionistic painter, the poet juxtaposes black and white into a canvas of brilliant contrasts. The night is pictured as being beautiful because it is dark—a welcome relief from the stark whiteness of the stars. The image suggests the pride in Negritude which became important in the Harlem Renaissance—the pride in the physical beauty of black people, the Negro folk culture which has enriched America, the strength which the Negro has earned through suffering. Cullen describes the night as being not only a lovely thing, but also a sheltering thing. The image of the buds that cannot bloom in light suggests that the Negro’s experience has created a unique place for him in American culture: there are songs that he alone can sing.

6 The final couplet combines the beautiful and sheltering concept of darkness with the basic symbol of futile planting. The poet now splashes a shocking red onto his black and white canvas. The dark becomes not only a shelter for developing buds, but also a place to conceal gaping wounds. These two lines are quiet but extremely disturbing: “So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds, / And wait, and tend our agonizing seeds.” And the reader cannot help wondering, what sort of planting will grow from these “agonizing seeds”?

¹ octave (n.): an eight-line stanza or section of a sonnet characterized by a specific rhyme scheme and setting out the problem of the sonnet

² sestet (n.): a six-line stanza or section of a sonnet with a specific rhyme scheme that usually answers the problem set out in the octave
After Reading
2. As you examine the preceding sources, make notes about your understanding of these readings by completing the graphic organizer below or by creating your own graphic organizer in your Reader/Writer Notebook. Note each category in the graphic organizer, and write notes as to what you can infer from the text about the literary and artistic movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. Be sure to cite textual evidence to support your understanding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Context</th>
<th>Art</th>
<th>Informational Text</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
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<td>Significant Authors and Works</td>
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Check Your Understanding

**Writing Prompt:** Select one aspect of the Harlem Renaissance (history, values and beliefs, authors and works, or genres and styles). Using the information that you have collected from primary and secondary sources, write an explanatory text that articulates your understanding of that aspect. Be sure to:

- Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts and details.
- Provide lead-ins to cite textual evidence, using transitions smoothly to connect ideas and create coherence.
- Integrate information to maintain the flow of ideas.
- Provide a conclusion that refers to your topic and the ideas developed in the essay.