The Harlem Renaissance: A Thematic Unit

Unit Overview

The Harlem Renaissance thematic unit focuses on the history, art, literature, music, and culture of Harlem, New York, during the 1920s and 1930s. During this time Harlem was a Mecca for American Negroes. Blacks fled the south where they were limited to field work, discriminated against by law, and persecuted by the Ku Klux Klan. Because of the flourishing of the arts and sciences in Harlem, this time period became known as the Harlem Renaissance, named after the period in Europe from 1400 to 1600 when the arts and letters flourished there. It is designed for intermediate to advanced ELL students in grades 9-12. It will be taught during the spring semester and will coincide with the study of Twentieth Century American history and literature. The unit is taught using reading, writing, listening, observing, and speaking activities.

The lessons throughout this unit facilitate student practice with vocabulary and concepts in the following disciplines:

American History – the black migration, Jim Crow laws, culture, economics, and mass transit

Art - painting

Music – jazz and blues

Literature – poetry and short stories
Social studies/geography- The United States, New York City, and New York state

Math- chronology, map skills, musical rhythms

Classroom language arts instruction includes language and vocabulary from short stories and poetry by Harlem Renaissance era writers.

Goals:

Content

The student will (TSW):

- Identify and describe themes common in Harlem Renaissance art, music, and literature.

- Compare and contrast life for blacks in the North versus life in the South.

- Analyze the expectations of blacks that moved North compared to the reality they met in the North.

- Develop respect for the African-American experience during the Harlem Renaissance.

- Distinguish between fact and opinion.

- Sharpen observation skills.

- Develop the ability to analyze and interpret historical data.

- Recognize the contribution in the arts that blacks made in the 1920s-1930s.

- Describe the differences between the blues and jazz.

Language

The student will (TSW):

- Read and discuss poems and short stories written by black writers during the Harlem Renaissance.
• Write their own poems based on concepts in the poems studied.

• Look at and discuss artwork produced by black artists during this era.

• Listen to and discuss the feelings they get from jazz and blues.

• Increase vocabulary through discussions of poetry forms including free verse and rhymed verse, rhythm, repetition, figurative language (metaphor and simile), stanza, and line.

• Increase oral narrative ability through daily discussion of what they see, hear, and read.

**Learning Strategies**

The student will (TSW):

• Use a variety of writing activities including labeling, writing sentences, writing paragraphs, formulating and reporting interpretations, describing visual and musical art.

• Work individually, with a partner, and in small groups as well as share orally in a whole class setting.

• Write original poetry demonstrating and applying their understanding of poetical terms such as free verse and figurative language.

• Perform a short story as readers’ theatre.

• Distinguish auditory differences between jazz and blues

• Utilize the internet to locate information

**ESL Standards (See after each day’s lesson)**

**Context:**

Grade levels: 9-12
Type of class: whole class – 30/45 minutes daily

Native Languages: Spanish and Russian

English proficiency levels: intermediate to advanced

Length of unit: three weeks

**Lesson 1:** Lesson objectives: Introduce the migration northward by African-Americans that lead to the Harlem Renaissance following World War I.

- Elicit students’ prior knowledge about American history, the Civil War, and slavery.
- Develop familiarity with the map of the United States and the location of the southern states, the Mississippi River, and New York.
- Pass out a map of the United States with state boundaries and waterways delineated but not labeled. Students work in small groups to label the Mississippi River, states on each side of it, and major cities mentioned in the migration east to Harlem.
- Discuss and repeat information about the states and the routes and reasons black people migrated north out of the South.
- Use the Internet to locate information on jazz music from the 1920s and 1930s and listen to audio clips by musicians from the time period.
- Read about Jim Crow laws and black codes in US History books.

**Assessment:** In collaborative groups of three or four, students create their own jazz band, giving it a name and themselves “jazzy” names. They will plan a “tour” for their band using a road map of the United States. Their tour will begin in Harlem and proceed to at least three cities and back to Harlem. They will calculate the distances and the amount of
time it would take to travel as well as plan out an itinerary. At the end of the “tour,” they will list some of the problems that they would have run into based on Jim Crow laws and black codes related to travel, food, hotels, segregation, and appearing on stage with white jazz musicians.

Goal 2, Standard 1: To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use English to Interact in the classroom.

Descriptors
- Gathering information orally
- Retelling information
- Listening, speaking, reading, and writing about the Harlem Renaissance related to US geography

Progress Indicators
- Identify US geographical features on a map
- Contribute to work in partners
- Participation in creation of an imaginary jazz band and its itinerary

Goal 2, Standard 2: To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form.

Descriptors
- Gathering information orally, from the Internet, and from textbooks
- Retelling information
- Preparing a written document

Progress Indicators
- Complete a US map
- Create an itinerary and identify segregation

Goal 2, Standard 3: To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge.

Descriptors
- Drawing connections between history and applying it to human experience
- Practicing new language

Progress Indicators
- Participation in class discussion
- Completion of group project

- Predict what may have become of jazz musicians from the era under study.
- Relate the experiences of current day musicians to those predicted for the past.
- Identify 10 challenging vocabulary words and determine their meanings.
- Identify characters, setting, plot, and theme as elements of a short story.
- Read the short story aloud, asking students directed listening-thinking activity questions as the story is read.
- Discuss the theme of homelessness.

Assessment: Students complete a story map in pairs.

Goal 2, Standard 2: To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form.

Descriptors
- Comparing and contrasting information
- Listening to, speaking, reading, and writing about subject matter information

Progress indicators
- Construct a chart or other graphic data
- Consult print and non-print sources in the native language when needed

Goal 3, Standard 3: To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to extend their sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence.

Descriptors
- Observing and modeling how others speak and behave in a particular situation or setting
- Analyzing the social context to determine appropriate language use

Progress indicators
- Observe language use and behaviors of peers in different settings
- Interpret meaning through knowledge of cultural factors that affect meaning (e.g. word choice, intonation, setting)
Lesson 3: Lesson Objectives: To create a timeline for the Harlem Renaissance era that includes a minimum of two events per decade of the Harlem Renaissance (1918 -1939). Students will provide a visual picture of at least one event per decade.

- Students work in groups of three or four.
- Using the overhead, chalkboard or butcher paper, elicit 4-6 events that the students have prior knowledge of. Use these events as a way to get students started on their timeline.
- Pass out paper that is approximately three feet in length, notebook paper, pencils, scissors, glue, markers, and crayons to each group of students.
- Students will need access to the Internet, encyclopedias, and US history textbooks to determine which events they would like to include on their timeline.
- Each event must be labeled with date/year and a short synopsis.
- Groups will present their timeline to the class and give a brief (3-4 minute) oral presentation that discusses the events chosen.

Assessment: Each group will be assessed on data collection, cooperation, and completion of the project. Social studies/history assessment focuses on demonstrating knowledge of the events chosen and on the chronological order of events.

Goal 1, Standard 3: To use English to communicate in social settings: Students will use learning strategies to extend their communicative competence.

Descriptors
- Focusing attention selectively
- Using the primary language to ask for clarification

Progress indicators
- Ask a classmate whether a particular word or phrase is correct
- Practice recently learned language by teaching a peer

Goal 3, Standard 1: To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use the appropriate language variety, register, and genre according to audience, purpose, and setting.
Descriptors
- Using the appropriate degree of formality with different audiences and settings
- Responding to and using humor appropriately in a group

Progress indicators
- Make polite requests
- Demonstrate an understanding of ways to give and receive compliments, show gratitude, apologize, and express anger or impatience

Lesson 4: Lesson objectives: Read selected poetry written by Langston Hughes, Countée Cullen, W.E.B. Dubois, Claude McKay, and Jean Toomer.

- Identify similes, metaphors, and personification in poetry lyrics.
- Listen for jazz rhythms in the poetry and “knock” out the rhythms on their desks as they read the poems aloud.
- Discuss the difference between free verse poems and structured poems while looking at samples of these authors’ works.
- Listen for end rhymes in rhymed poem and repeat after the teacher the pronunciation of the rhyming words.
- Generate a list of new words and act out or look up their meanings as necessary.
- Identify poems that do not rhyme versus rhymed poems.
- Discuss themes of the poems and how they relate to the African-American experience during the Harlem Renaissance.

Assessment: Students write their own versions of one of the poems studied replacing key words and phrases with their own to reflect their experiences in America. They should begin with a word cluster and then work those ideas into their own free verse poems. Students read their poems aloud to the class and post them on the classroom wall.
Goal 1, Standard 2: To use English to communicate in social settings: Students will interact in, through, and with spoken and written English for persona expression and enjoyment.

Descriptors
- Describing, reading about, or participating in an activity
- Expressing personal needs, feelings, and ideas

Progress indictors
- Write a poem, short story, play, or song
- Listen to, read, watch, and respond to plays, films, stories, books, songs, poems, computer programs, and magazines

Goal 3, Standard 2: To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, and setting.

Descriptors
- Demonstrating knowledge of acceptable nonverbal classroom behaviors
- Using acceptable tone, volume, stress, intonation, in various social settings

Progress indicators
- Maintain appropriate level of eye contact with audience while giving an oral presentation
- Compare gestures and body language acceptable in formal and informal settings

Lesson 5: Lesson objectives: Students understand and appreciate the short story by Langston Hughes entitled “Thank You, Ma’am.”

- Generate list of predictions for what the story will be about.
- Use directed reading-thinking questions as the story is read silently. Divide the story into four sections. Before reading each section, put a list of key words that might be unfamiliar to students and have them look up their meanings. After students have read a section silently, ask them about the predictions they made. Ask students why they think the characters are doing what they are doing and what they think is going to happen. Have them locate the vocabulary words in context. Continue with the same pattern through the rest of the story making predictions, reading silently, and monitoring their predictions. Encourage them to create their own questions about the story.
Identify the main characters and settings.

In groups of 4 on separate large tablet pages, have students draw an image of Mrs. Luella Washington Jones and of the boy from “Thank You, Ma’am” then label what is going on in each character’s head, heart, and stomach; what their hands do; what their mouths say; and where their feet take them.

Direct students to create readers’ theatre scenes in groups using the content of the conversations in the story with a volunteer group or groups performing a scene for the class.

Review and discuss economic and social conditions in Harlem during this time.

**Assessment:** Using the character drawings as an aid, students write out a summary of the story in paragraph form.

**Goal 2, Standard 3:** To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge.

**Descriptors**
- Use context to construct meaning
- Evaluate one’s own success in completing a task

**Progress indicators**
- Practice an oral report with a peer prior to presenting to the class
- Rehearse and visualize information

**Goal 3, Standard 1:** To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use the appropriate language variety, register, and genre according to audience, purpose, and setting.

**Descriptors**
- Recognizing and using standard English and vernacular dialects appropriately
- Responding to and using slang appropriately

**Progress indicators**
- Recognize irony, sarcasm, and humor in a variety of contexts
- Advise peers on appropriate language use
Lesson 6: Lesson objectives: In pairs, students use the Internet to locate paintings done by Harlem Renaissance artists and analyze the paintings for their use of specific images, color, light and dark, and movement.

- Direct students to search the Internet using Harlem Art, Harlem Renaissance Paintings, Harlem Art Museums, and other related keywords.
- Students display the art they found on the Internet (printed out in color) and in the library on the classroom walls and shelves.
- Discuss the images, colors, use of light and lines used in the art as a whole putting key words on the board.
- Identify the mood created in each artwork.

Assessment: Using vocabulary from the list on the board, each pair presents an oral presentation about the work they chose.

Goal 1, Standard 1: To use English to communicate in social settings: Students will use English to participate in social interaction.

Descriptors
- Engaging in conversations
- Expressing ideas

Progress indicators
- Describe feelings and emotions created by artwork
- Indicate opinions, interests and preferences of artwork

Goal 3, Standard 3: To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to extend their sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence.

Descriptors
- Seek information about appropriate information about appropriate language uses and behaviors
- Analyze the social situation to determine proper use of language

Progress indicators
- Observe language use in different settings (group/class)
- Evaluate different types of communication (written, verbal) used to make a point
**Lesson 7:** Lesson Objectives: Students will become familiar with the names and styles of artists from the Harlem Renaissance era. Students will demonstrate their research and oral presentation capabilities.

- Students will work in groups of 2-4 to research an artist from the Harlem Renaissance era.

- Student groups will choose one artist from the era to research, write a two-page paper on and showcase his or her works in the form of an oral presentation.

- A graphic organizer (attached) will be used to gather information to be used in both the oral and written presentations.

- Three or more sources must be used in the gathering of information about the artist. At least one source must be an Internet source.

- Each group must provide a minimum of five facts and three works in their presentation about the artist. Two visual aides must be included.

- The oral report must be in one of these formats, unless approved to do otherwise by the teacher: a play or skit, a report (you are the reporter as in Dan Rather or Connie Chung), or an oral presentation as the artist (telling about yourself and your work).

**Assessment:** Data collection techniques to include organization, time-management, accuracy, and identification of sources/use of sources will be assessed. Assess oral reporting skills by observing body language, eye contact with the audience, voice projection/tone, and understanding of the topic. Cooperative learning assessment by observing and noting leadership, cooperation, group dynamics, work division. Written report will be assessed utilizing the Six Traits of Writing (Voice, Content & Ideas,
Organization, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions). Assessment of oral presentation will be on originality, enjoyment, visual aides, and knowledge of the content.

Goal 1, Standard 1: To use English to communicate in social settings: Students will use English to participate in social interaction.

Descriptors
- Sharing information with others
- Using non-verbal communication in social interactions

Progress indicators
- Express feelings through drama
- Verbally engage a listener's attention

Goal 1, Standard 3: To use English to communicate in social settings: Students will use learning strategies to extend their communicative competence.

Descriptors
- Imitating how others use English
- Seeking support and feedback from others

Progress indicators
- Ask a classmate whether a word or phrase is correctly used
- Ask someone the meaning of a word or phrase if unsure

Lesson 8: Lesson Objectives: Introduce students to the blues and marches played during the Harlem Renaissance through the use of music, singing, and movement. Students will listen and respond to lyrics by repeating words and motions as demonstrated by the leader. By the end of the lesson, students will be able to differentiate between blues and a march using a Venn diagram.

- Arrange students in a semi-circle facing the teacher. Have students put their arms out to their sides to establish the amount of space needed to move comfortably.
- Play a selection of the blues (“Cakewalkin’ Babies From Home,” Bessie Smith) and hand out the lyrics for students to sing along. Students will follow the
teachers lead by tapping four times on the head, four times on the shoulders, four times moving the upper body, four times tapping the knees and four times tapping the ankles to the beat of the music. Then work backwards from the ankles to the head in the same manner.

- Ask students how the blues made them feel, how they think it made others feel, what thoughts they had, what thoughts they thought the artist may have had and what thoughts other students might have had. Does the selection make you feel like running and jumping or taking a nap? Overall, what is the mood the blues elicited?

- Play a selection of a march (“Repasz Band March,” Dawn of the Century Ragtime Orchestra). Students follow the teacher’s lead by tapping four times on the head as in the activity above.

- Ask students how the march made them feel using the same or similar questions as in activity above.

- Replay (or choose another selection such as “Crazy Blues,” Mamie Smith or “East St. Louis”) the selection of the blues and have students move to the music in any fashion. Do the same with a march (use “The Aviators” by John Philip Sousa or “Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company”). Caution students to be appropriate in their movements.

- Using a Venn diagram, lead a class discussion to determine what differences and similarities students noted between blues and marches. (As an alternative each student may be given a Venn diagram to fill out on his/her own and then come together to fill in the class diagram and have the discussion.)
**Assessment:** Student participation may be assessed as to full, shy, partial, or no participation during the movement to the selections. Venn diagram completion should be assessed as a participation grade. Accuracy is important, but completion of the diagram is the goal. Six selections of blues and marches should be played for the class and students should be able to correctly identify four of six selections. This may be done as a quiz with students holding up a card with a “B” or “M” on it or by using a more traditional quiz.

**Goal 2, Standard 3:** To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge.

**Descriptors**
- Selectively focusing attention on the leader
- Apply self-monitoring/self-corrective strategies to build and expand knowledge base

**Progress indicators**
- Use nonverbal and verbal cues to know when to pay attention
- Take risks

**Goal 3, Standard 2:** To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways: Students will use nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, and setting.

**Descriptors**
- Adjust behavior in response to nonverbal cues
- Use acceptable volume during classroom activities

**Progress indicators**
- Describe an individual’s intent by focusing on nonverbal behaviors
- Correctly respond to teacher’s gestures

**Lesson 9:** Lesson Objectives: Introduce students to jazz through the use of music.

Use ratios, rates and proportions to report data. Collect data through listening, counting, and timing.

- As an introduction, have students watch episode two (1:39:35 – 1:40:12) from the PBS Ken Burns JAZZ documentary where Arvell Shaw compares jazz music to a heartbeat.
• Choose an activity that students are familiar with that is done to a steady rhythm such as jumping jacks, nursery rhymes or a jump rope song (Cinderella, dressed in yellow, went upstairs to kiss a fella, how many kisses did she get? 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . etc. Bring in a jump rope and let a few students jump (or hold) while the class recites the rhythm.

• In groups of 3 – 4, students will use the stopwatch to find their heart rate in beats per minute. To measure heart rate, place two fingertips on the underside of the wrist of your other hand, just below the base of your thumb. Count the pulsations for 10 seconds. Have students use equivalent ratios to calculate beats per minute.

Example: 12 beats in 10 seconds = \( \frac{12}{10} \times \frac{6}{6} = 72 \text{ beats/60 seconds (1 minute)} \)

It may be necessary to review equivalent ratios with students prior to collecting the data. Each student should complete 3 trials to get accurate data.

• To emphasize ratio, rates and proportion, complete the attached worksheet, “Jazz: The Heartbeat Goes On,” comparing different lengths of data collection.

Assessment: Assess cooperative learning interactions (leadership, cooperation, group reporting techniques). Assess aspects of data collection (organization, accuracy, computation, etc.). Math assessment focuses on demonstrating an understanding of concepts of ratios, rates, and proportion as well as accurate calculations.

As an introduction, have students watch episode two (1:39:35 – 1:40:12) from the

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Goal 1, Standard 3: To use English to communicate in social settings: Students will use learning strategies to extend their communicative competence.

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**Lesson #10:** Lesson Objectives: Introduce students to games played during the Harlem Renaissance era.

- Discuss the vocabulary of the game with the students before playing the game.

  “Imbube” (I mboo-bay) means lion, “Mbube” (mboo-bay) is a person calling to the lion. In this game the lion (Imbube) is stalking the impala (a southern African male impala). (This game is similar to Marco Polo.)

  - Establish the rules of the game.
  - All players form a circle.
  - Two players start the game, one is the lion, one is the impala.
  - Blindfold them both and spin them around (children used to just close their eyes, but the temptation to peek is so great!)
  - Players in the circle start by calling the lion, “Mbube, mbube!”
The closer to the impala the lion gets, the faster the chanting becomes. If the lion is far away, the chanting decreases, in volume as well as repetition.

If the lion has not caught the impala within a minute or two, a new lion is chosen. If the lion catches the impala, a new impala is chosen.

**Assessment:** Assess students by watching their level of involvement in the chanting and the overall game. Students should be able to tell another student how to play the game by the end of the class period.

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