Foundations of the Harlem Renaissance

Arts-integrated lesson plans for students in grades 8-12.
The Boston Symphony Orchestra’s Department of Education and Community Programs has a variety of curriculum kits that are available for teachers and educators for grades K-12. For more information on our educational materials and programs, please contact the Education Office at: 301 Massachusetts Ave, Boston, MA 02115, (617) 638-9373.
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Introduction

The Boston Symphony Orchestra’s Harlem Renaissance kit was created in order to raise awareness about the rich artistic heritage of African-Americans. These materials are intended for use by classroom teachers to supplement existing curriculum. The kit is divided into three volumes: Foundations, Great Artists, and Music.

This kit is a production of the Boston Symphony Orchestra Department of Education and Community Programs. Feedback is welcomed, please contact the BSO with any comments or questions.

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The Harlem Renaissance

The post-World War I era in the United States was marked by more than a decade of unprecedented African-American artistic achievement and recognition. This “flowering” of art, music, and literature was centered in the African-American community in Harlem, NY, and is known as the Harlem Renaissance. The African-Americans who converged in Harlem in the 1920’s included the descendants of Southern slaves, who had migrated to Harlem to escape poverty and racism in the South, and immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. They formed a thriving intellectual and artistic community in Harlem, which became known as a cultural center for African-Americans.

It was during the Harlem Renaissance that the self-assertiveness of the “New Negro” was realized. The “New Negro” challenged established racial stereotypes through his intellect and production of literature, art, and music. As black artists sought to explore their ethnic identity and heritage, they used a variety of artistic styles and forms. The art of the Harlem Renaissance embraced the European standards, pan-Africanism, and the depiction of both “high-culture” and “low-culture.” This artistic activity included the cultivation of musical genres such as blues and jazz. As a result the 1920’s are also known as the “Jazz Age.”

The black intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance promoted Negro art, but the artists were also supported by a number of white American patrons. These white patrons were supportive of so-called “primitive” culture, and wanted to see this “primitivism” in the work of the Harlem Renaissance artists. The interest in “primitivism” contributed to the popularity of Broadway shows like Porgy and Bess, and the popularity of the Harlem “trade clubs,” which featured black artists but catered to white audiences. Despite its continued exploitation, African-American leaders saw art as the instrument that would transform social perception and political thought, and lead to integration and equality.

Through a proliferation of cultural and artistic activity, the Harlem Renaissance provided a window to the African-American experience in United States. The Harlem Renaissance fostered African-American artistic talent, while bringing it to the attention of white America. This recognition of African-American artists, coupled with the establishment of organizations such as the UNIA and the NAACP, laid the groundwork for the Civil Rights movement. Although the Harlem Renaissance ended with the Great Depression, its optimistic spirit and themes of humanism and self-determination still resonate with us today.
A Walk Through Harlem

Background

The following video worksheet has been prepared to help students learn about the historical context of the Harlem Renaissance and also to give them the opportunity to reflect on this information through written personal thoughts.

The worksheet is based on the first part (~40 minutes) of the PBS Video, *A Walk Through Harlem with David Hartman and Historian Barry Lewis*. The questions on the worksheet follow the order of the video.

It is important that students read the worksheet before they view the video, then, while watching the video, indicate their responses to the questions.
A Walk Through Harlem

The Harlem Renaissance was a period of great artistic achievement for African-Americans in the United States. It began around 1920, and lasted for at least a decade. Many famous artists were part of the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas, Duke Ellington and Bessie Smith.

This video will take you on a walking tour through historic Harlem, to look at special landmarks and sites in West/Central Harlem. While you are watching the video fill out the questions on this worksheet in order. Each section of the worksheet corresponds to part of the video.

Good luck!

Questions

1. What neighborhood in New York is this film about?
   a. Harlem
   b. Washington Heights
   c. Lenox Hill
   d. Jamaica Center
2. What is Harlem known for?

a. capital of black America during the early 20th century  
b. cultural center of the United States after World War I  
c. birthplace of the Harlem Renaissance  
d. all of the above

3. When was Harlem founded?

a. by English settlers in the 20th century  
b. by Spanish settlers in the 18th century  
c. by Dutch settlers in the mid-17th century  
d. none of the above

4. What effect did the arrival of the elevated railroad in the 1880’s have on Harlem?

a. it connected the neighborhood of Harlem to other parts of the city  
b. it stimulated economic growth  
c. it brought people and supplies to Harlem  
d. all of the above

5. What was the center of black Harlem in the 1910’s?

a. Astor row  
b. 135th st  
c. Marcus Garvey Park  
d. 151st st

6. During World War I, a unit called the “Harlem Hellfighters” fought for the United States. What country recognized the Hellfighters for their courage and valor under fire?

a. The United States  
b. France  
c. Britain  
d. Germany
7. Where and when was the victory parade for the Harlem Hellfighters?
   a. Lenox Ave, Harlem in 1900
   b. 135th St., Harlem in 1930
   c. Lenox Ave, Harlem in 1919
   d. 135th St., Harlem in 1945

8. Who was James Van Der Zee?
   a. Photographer from Harlem
   b. Writer from Boston
   c. Musician from New Orleans
   d. Poet from Washington, D.C.

9. What was he known for?
   a. documenting the history of the Harlem community
   b. acting as the “visual voice” of the Harlem Renaissance
   c. portraying the people and places of the Harlem Renaissance
   d. all of the above

10. Who was Marcus Garvey?
    a. a native of Manhattann, Harlem real-estate developer
    b. a native of Jamaica, African nationalist
    c. a writer and painter of the Harlem Renaissance
    d. the founder of the United Negro Improvement Association
    e. b and d

11. What were Marcus Garvey’s goals as a leader?
    a. to form an organization for African-Americans that would help them develop a sense of pride in their history
    b. to become president of the United States
    c. to work for the independence of countries in the Carribean and Africa
    d. a and b
    e. a and c
12. What was “Speakers Corner”, also known as the “crossroads of the black world” in 1910?

a. the corner of 135th and Lenox  
b. a place for public speakers to stand on soap boxes and voice their opinions  
c. the nexus of the new black population in Harlem  
d. all of the above

13. Who was known as “the most dangerous black man in America”?

a. A. Philip Randolph  
b. Marcus Garvey  
c. James Van Der Zee  
d. Arturo Schomberg

14. What did he do?

a. organize blacks on the labor front  
b. get FDR to integrate defense into budget  
c. bring intellectual life to Harlem  
d. all of the above

15. Why did Arturo Schomberg collect materials on African American life?

a. he wanted to make money as a collector  
b. he wanted to prove that African-Americans contributed to the culture of America  
c. he owned a museum in Harlem  
d. he was writing a history of black America

16. What was the Harlem Renaissance?

a. a social movement that began in the 1920’s  
b. an artistic movement during the 19th century  
c. a political movement in the rural South  
d. none of the above
17. Who were some of the writers and poets of the Harlem Renaissance?

___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________
___________________________________

18. Who was Madam CJ Walker, and what did she do?

a. an entrepreneur who created a line of hair products for African-Americans  
b. a pioneering woman of the United States  
c. the owner of a hair salon in Harlem  
d. all of the above

19. What was the name of Madam CJ Walker’s daughter?

a. Donna Walker  
b. Leona Walker  
c. A’lelia Walker  
d. Larissa Walker

20. What was the “dark tower”?

a. a gathering place for the Harlem literati  
b. a place for African-American poetry readings and art showings  
c. the legacy of the Walker family  
d. all of the above
Answer key:

1. a
2. d
3. c
4. d
5. b
6. b
7. c
8. a
9. d
10. e
11. e
12. a
13. a
14. d
15. b
16. a
17. Alain Locke, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes
18. d
19. c
20. d

Questions for Discussion

- How was Harlem built? What types of people contributed to the growth and urbanization of the neighborhood?

- What was the Harlem Renaissance? How did it begin, and what kinds of people were involved in the movement?

- How did the culture of Harlem affect the lives of African-Americans in this country?

- Why is it important to understand the history of the neighborhood of Harlem? What were some of the ways that people from the Harlem Renaissance contributed to the Civil Rights movement?
The Great Migration

Objectives

Students will:
- Learn about the economic, social, and political factors that led to the Great Migration
- Examine two important works of the Harlem Renaissance
- Discuss the correlation between the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance
- Design a mural that chronicles the Great Migration

Materials

Langston Hughes poem, “The South”

Selected panels from Jacob Lawrence, “Migration Series”
(Use the book Lawrence/The Great Migration or the Migration Series slide set, both items are included in this kit.)

Art materials (paint or collage supplies)

Background

The Great Migration was a movement northward by African-Americans living in the South in the early 20th century. Approximately 2 million people relocated from the Southern to the Northern United States during the period from 1890-1920. The Great Migration was influenced by racism in the South, and apparent tolerance in the North; a shortage of labor in the North caused by World War I (draft and anti-immigration legislation); and Southern crop failures due to drought and flooding, which lead to poor economic conditions and a shortage of jobs in the South.

Events leading to the Great Migration

1890 Beginning of the Great Migration of African-Americans to Northern cities (2 million people from 1890-1920)

1900-08 Race riots in many Southern and Northern cities, including: New Orleans; NY City; Atlanta, GA; Springfield, OH; Brownsville, TX; Houston, TX.

1910 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is founded. W.E.B. Du Bois is the director of the monthly magazine, Crisis.
The National Urban League also formed to improve the living/working conditions of urban blacks.

1915  Recruiters for northern companies begin to travel to South to hire workers; they offer higher pay rates and promise of a better life.

1915-16  Drought and heavy rains leads to crop failures in the South; a record boll weevil infestation helps destroy two years of crops.

1917  Marcus Garvey emigrates from Jamaica to Harlem, NY, and founds the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

1914-18  World War I. The decrease in European immigration and the draft in 1917 leaves northern cities lacking in workers.

Introduction

Make a class timeline as you go over the events that led to the Great Migration.

Have the class identify three main factors that caused African-Americans to move Northward:

- Racism in South, and apparent tolerance in the North
- Shortage of labor in the North caused by World War I (draft and anti-immigration legislation)
- Southern crop failures due to drought and flooding, which lead to poor economic conditions and shortage of jobs in the South

Development

Read poem “The South” by Langston Hughes.

Tell students that Langston Hughes was an African-American poet who lived in Harlem during the 1920’s. He grew up in Missouri, and migrated to Harlem in 1921. This poem was written in 1923 as part of a collection of poems entitled The Weary Blues.

Discussion:

What is the author’s attitude towards the South?
What can you learn about the author’s experiences in the South by reading this poem?
View paintings from Jacob Lawrence’s “Migration Series”. The “Migration Series” is a collection of 60 paintings by Harlem Renaissance painter Jacob Lawrence. The paintings were commissioned by the Rosenwald Foundation, and completed in 1941.

Discussion:

Have students identify the phases of the Great Migration that are illustrated in each painting.

What is the perspective of each painting?
What is the subject matter?
What is the mood or tone?
How do the colors and textures convey mood or emotion?

Discuss the differences between Hughes’ and Lawrence’s visions of the South.

Activity

Have students design a mural or triptych based on the Great Migration.

Students should:

• Make a list of the events that occurred
• Draw a sketch of their mural
• Include notes on what information, imagery, and emotion they would like to convey in each panel

Have students use paint or collage techniques to create their murals. Display finished murals in a school exhibit.

Adaptation for Younger Students

Materials

Walter Dean Myers poem “Harlem”

Art materials to make a collage, or writing materials to write poems.
Activity

1. Tell Students about the Great Migration:
   
   - Over 2 million African-Americans moved to Northern states because of racism and a lack of jobs in the South
   - It began in 1890 and lasted until at least 1920
   - Lots of African-American artists and writers moved to the North so they would have more creative freedom
   - They went to cities like New York and Chicago and built communities

2. Read the poem “Harlem” to the class. Ask students to write down things the poem describes about Harlem while you are reading, and then discuss the lists when the poem is over.

3. Have students brainstorm about things that make up the community or city they live in.

5. Have students write down at least five things that characterize their community. Using their lists, students can write a poem about their community or make a collage with drawings about their community.
Supplementary Materials

The next few pages include supplementary materials that may be used with The Great Migration lesson plan. Included are photos of the artists, a poem by Langston Hughes “The South”, and images by Jacob Lawrence (from the Migration Series).

Langston Hughes poem “The South” is part of a collection of poems that he published entitled The Weary Blues. The paintings by Jacob Lawrence are from the Migration Series, a set of 60 paintings depicting the migration of African-Americans from the South to the North in the early twentieth century. Lawrence completed the Migration Series in 1941 after receiving a grant from the Rosenwald Foundation.

Hughes, Langston (1902-1967)

Lawrence, Jacob (1917-2000)
Langston Hughes, “The South”

The South (1923)

The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth.
The sunny-faced South,
    Beast-strong,
    Idiot-brained.
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire’s ashes
    For a Negro’s bones.
Cotton and the moon,
    Warmth, earth, warmth,
The sky, the sun, the stars,
The magnolia-scented South.
    Beautiful, like a woman,
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
    Passionate, cruel,
    Honey-lipped, syphilitic--
    That is the South.

And I, who am black, would love her
    But she spits in my face.
And I, who am black,
    Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me.
    So now I seek the North--
The cold-faced North,
    For she, they say,
    Is a kinder mistress,
And in her house my children
    May escape the spell of the South.
Jacob Lawrence, Migration Series

Migration Series 1940–41

Panel #1
During the World War there was a great migration North of Southern Negroes.

Migration Series 1940–41

Panel #3
In every town Negroes were leaving by the Hundreds to go North and enter into Northern industry.
Migration Series
1940-41

Panel #34
*The Black Press Urged the People to Leave the South.*

Migration Series
1940-41

Panel #57
*The Female Worker Was Also One of The Last Groups to Leave the South.*
“Children learn more from what you are than what you teach.”

-W.E.B. DuBois (1897)
Founding Fathers
W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey

Objectives
Students will:
- Learn about the lives of W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey
- Compare the philosophical viewpoints of W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey
- Read and analyze a critical response to “Garveyism”

Materials
Garvey, Marcus, “The Future As I See It” (1923).

Background
W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey were civil rights activists and intellectual leaders of the Harlem Renaissance who sought to improve living and working conditions for African-Americans.

W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) was a writer and scholar from Massachusetts, who founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP was established to help provide better living and working conditions for African-Americans. He was also the editor of the Crisis magazine, which featured African-American writers and artists.

Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) was a journalist and businessman from Jamaica, whose many business ventures included the Black Star Shipping Line. He preached afrocentrism and black nationalism and founded the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

Introduction
Read and analyze biographical information on W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey.

Help the class make a chart to compare their lives and viewpoints.
Have the class read “Race Pride” by W.E.B. DuBois. This essay was published in 1920 in the Crisis, a NAACP magazine.

Discussion:

What point of view is expressed in this essay?
For what audience did the author write this essay?
What is W.E.B. DuBois’ definition of “race pride”?
What effect might this article have had in New York in 1920?

Have the class read the sections The Negro is Ready and An Inspiring Vision from the essay “The Future As I See It” by Marcus Garvey.

Discussion:

What are the goals of the United Negro Improvement Association?
What is Marcus Garvey’s vision of the future?
How are Garvey’s ideas similar to those of W.E.B. DuBois?

Have the class read excerpts from “Garveyism” by Philip Randolph.

Discussion:

How is “Garveyism” defined in this essay?
What arguments does Randolph make against “Garveyism”?
According to Randolph, what good has Garveyism accomplished?

**Activity #1**

Students will write an essay comparing “Race Pride” by W.E.B. DuBois and “The Future As I See It” by Marcus Garvey.

**Activity #2**

Students will pretend they are reporters living during the Harlem Renaissance, with the job of interviewing W.E.B. DuBois or Marcus Garvey.

Students should make a list of questions to ask at the interview.
Examples:

Why did you come to Harlem?
What do you think of the recent race riots (during the summer of 1919) in the South? (this was described as “The Red Summer” by James Weldon Johnson)
What are your views on equal rights in this country?
What do you hope to achieve with the NAACP (or UNIA)?
What do you think are the most important issues facing the country today?

Activity Extension

Have students work in groups of two. Students should choose another famous person from the Harlem Renaissance to do research on. One person should be the “reporter” and the other should act as the famous person. Have students to make a transcript of an imaginary interview, writing down both questions and answers.

The finished project can be read aloud to the class.
Supplementary Materials

The next few pages include materials that may be used with the Founding Fathers lesson plan. Included are photos of the featured writers, and the following essays: “Race Pride” by W.E.B. DuBois, “The Future As I See It” by Marcus Garvey, and “Garveyism” by A. Philip Randolph.

W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963)

Civil rights activist, writer, scholar. Born in Great Barrington, MA. Founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and editor of the Crisis magazine. Died August 27, 1963.

Marcus Garvey (1887-1940)

Asa Philip Randolph (1889-1979)

Labor and Civil Rights leader, founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Born in Crescent City, Florida.
Our friends are hard—very hard—to please. Only yesterday they were preaching “Race Pride.”

“Go to!” they said, “and be PROUD of your race.”

If we hesitated or sought to explain—Away,” they yelled; “Ashamed-of- Yourself and Want-to-be-White!”

Of course, the Amazing Major is still at it, but do you notice that others say less—because they see that bull-headed worship of any “race,” as such, may lead and does lead to curious complications?

For instance: Today Negroes, Indians, Chinese, and other groups, are gaining new faith in themselves; they are beginning to “like” themselves; they are discovering that the current theories and stories of “backward” peoples are largely lies and assumptions; that human genius and possibility are not limited by color, race, or blood. What is this new self-consciousness leading to? Inevitably and directly to distrust and hatred of whites; to demands for self-government, separation, driving out of foreigners: “Asia for the Asiatics,” “Africa for the Africans,” and “Negro officers for Negro troops!”

No sooner do whites see this unawaited development than they point out in dismay the inevitable consequences: “You lose our tutelage,” ’You spurn our knowledge,” “You need our wealth and technique.” They point out how fine is the world role of Elder Brother.

Very well. Some of the darker brethren are convinced. They draw near in friendship; they seek to enter schools and churches; they would mingle in industry—when lo! “Get out,” yells the White World— “You’re not our brothers and never will be”— “Go away, herd by yourselves—Eternal Segregation in the Lord!”

Can you wonder, Sirs, that we are a bit puzzled by all this and that we are asking gently, but more and more insistently, Choose one or the other horn of the dilemma:

1. Leave the black and yellow world alone. Get out of Asia, Africa, and the Isles. Give us our states and towns and sections and let us rule them undisturbed. Absolutely segregate the races and sections of the world

Or—

2. Let the world meet as men with men. Give utter Justice to all. Extend Democracy to all and treat all men according to their individual desert. Let it be possible for whites to rise to the highest positions in China and Uganda and blacks to the highest honors in England and Texas.

Here is the choice. Which will you have, my masters?

- from the Crisis, Vol. XIX (1920).
Marcus Garvey - “The Future As I See It” (1923)

It comes to the individual, the race, the nation, once in a life time to decide upon the course to be pursued as a career. The hour has now struck for the individual Negro as well as the entire race to decide the course that will be pursued in the interests of our own liberty. We who make up the Universal Negro Improvement Association have decided that we shall go forward, upward and onward toward the great goal of human liberty. We have determined among ourselves that all barriers placed in the way of our progress must be removed, must be cleared away for we desire to see the light of a brighter day.

THE NEGRO IS READY
The Universal Negro Improvement Association for five years has been proclaiming to the world the readiness of the Negro to carve out a pathway for himself in the course of life. Men of other races and nations have become alarmed at this attitude of the Negro in his desire to do things for himself and by himself. This alarm has become so universal that organizations have been brought into being here, there and everywhere for the purpose of deterring and obstructing this forward move of our race. Propaganda has been waged here, there and everywhere for the purpose of misinterpreting the intention of this organization; some have said that this organization seeks to create discord and discontent among the races; some say we are organized for the purpose of hating other people. Every sensible, sane and honest-minded person knows that the Universal Negro Improvement Association has no such intention. We are organized for the absolute purpose of bettering our condition, industrially, commercially, socially, religiously and politically. We are organized not to hate other men, but to lift ourselves, and to demand respect of all humanity. We have a program that we believe to be righteous; we believe it to be just, and we have made up our minds to lay down ourselves on the altar of sacrifice for the realization of this great hope of ours, based upon the foundation of righteousness. We declare to the world that Africa must be free, that the entire Negro race must be emancipated from industrial bondage, peonage and serfdom; we make no compromise, we make no apology in this our declaration. We do not desire to create offense on the part of other races, but we are determined that we shall be heard, that we shall be given the rights to which we are entitled.

THE PROPAGANDA OF OUR ENEMIES
For the purpose of creating doubts about the work of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, many attempts have been made to cast shadow and gloom over our work. They have even written the most uncharitable things about our organization; they have spoken so unkindly of our effort, but what do we care? They spoke unkindly and uncharitarily about all the reform movements that have helped in the betterment of humanity. They maligned the great movement of the Christian religion; they maligned the great liberation movements of America, of France, of England, of Russia; can we expect, then, to escape being maligned in this, our desire for the liberation of Africa and the freedom of four hundred million Negroes of the world? We have unscrupulous men and organizations working in opposition to us. Some trying to capitalize the new spirit that has come to the Negro to make profit out of it to their own selfish benefit; some are trying to set back the Negro from seeing the hope of his own liberty, and thereby poisoning our people’s mind against the motives of our organization; but every sensible far-seeing Negro in this enlightened age knows what propaganda means. It is the medium of discredit-
ing that which you are opposed to, so that the propaganda of our enemies will be of little avail as soon as we are rendered able to carry to our peoples scattered throughout the world the true message of our great organization.

“CROCODILES” AS FRIENDS
Men of the Negro race, let me say to you that a greater future is in store for us; we have no cause to lose hope, to become faint-hearted. We must realize that upon ourselves depend our destiny, our future; we must carve out that future, that destiny, and we who make up the Universal Negro Improvement Association have pledged ourselves that nothing in the world shall stand in our way, nothing in the world shall discourage us, but opposition shall make us work harder, shall bring us closer together so that as one man the millions of us will march on toward that goal that we have set for our selves. The new Negro shall not be deceived. The new Negro refuses to take advice from anyone who has not felt with him, and suffered with him. We have suffered for three hundred years, therefore we feel that the time has come when only those who have suffered with us can interpret our feelings and our spirit. It takes the slave to interpret the feelings of the slave; it takes the unfortunate man to interpret the spirit of his unfortunate brother; and so it takes the suffering Negro to interpret the spirit of his comrade. It is strange that so many people are interested in the Negro now, willing to advise him how to act, and what organizations he should join, yet nobody was interested in the Negro to the extent of not making him a slave for two hundred and fifty years, reducing him to industrial peonage and serfdom after he was freed; it is strange that the same people can be so interested in the Negro now, as to tell him what organization he should follow and what leader he should support.

Whilst we are bordering on a future of brighter things, we are also at our danger period, when we must either accept the right philosophy, or go down by following deceptive propaganda which has hemmed us in for many centuries.

DECEIVING THE PEOPLE
There is many a leader of our race who tells us that every thing is well, and that all things will work out themselves and that a better day is coming. Yes, all of us know that a better day is coming; we all know that one day we will go home to Paradise, but whilst we are hoping by our Christian virtues to have an entry into Paradise we also realize that we are living on earth, and that the things that are practised in Paradise are not practised here. You have to treat this world as the world treats you; we are living in a temporal, material age, an age of activity, an age of racial, national selfishness. What else can you expect but to give back to the world what the world gives to you, and we are calling upon the four hundred million Negroes of the world to take a decided stand, a deter mined stand, that we shall occupy a firm position; that position shall be an eman cipated race and a free nation of our own. We are determined that we shall have a free country; we are determined that we shall have a flag; we are determined that we shall have a government second to none in the world.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE
Men may spurn the idea, they may scoff at it; the metropolitan press of this country may deride us; yes, white men may laugh at the idea of Negroes talking about government; but let me tell you there is going to be a government, and let me say to you also that whatsoever you give, in like measure it shall be returned to you. The world is sinful, and therefore man believes in the doctrine of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Everybody believes that revenge is God’s, but at the same
time we are men, and revenge sometimes springs up, even in the most Christian heart. Why should man write down a history that will react against him? Why should man perpetrate deeds of wickedness upon his brother which will return to him in like measure? Yes, the Germans maltreated the French in the Franco Prussian war of 1870, but the French got even with the Germans in 1918. It is history, and history will repeat itself. Beat the Negro, brutalize the Negro, kill the Negro, burn the Negro, imprison the Negro, scoff at the Negro, deride the Negro, it may come back to you one of these fine days, because the supreme destiny of man is in the hands of God. God is no respector of persons, whether that person be white, yellow or black. Today the one race is up, tomorrow it has fallen; today the Negro seems to be the footstool of the other races and nations of the world; tomorrow the Negro may occupy the highest rung of the great human ladder. But when we come to consider the history of man, was not the Negro a power, was he not great once? Yes, honest students of history can recall the day when Egypt, Ethiopia and Timbuctoo towered in their civilizations, towered above Europe, towered above Asia. When Europe was inhabited by a race of cannibals, a race of savages, naked men, heathens and pagans, Africa was peopled with a race of cultured black men, who were masters in art, science and literature; men who were cultured and refined; men who, it was said, were like the gods. Even the great poets of old sang in beautiful sonnets of the delight it afforded the gods to be in companionship with the Ethiopians. Why, then, should we lose hope? Black men, you were once great; you shall be great again. Lose not courage, lose not faith, go forward. The thing to do is to get organized; keep separated and you will be exploited, you will be robbed, you will be killed. Get organized, and you will compel the world to respect you. If the world fails to give you consideration, because you are black men, because you are Negroes, four hundred millions of you shall, through organization, shake the pillars of the universe and bring down creation, even as Samson brought down the temple upon his head and upon the heads of the Philistines.

AN INSPIRING VISION

So Negroes, I say, through the Universal Negro Improvement Association, that there is much to live for. I have a vision of the future, and I see before me a picture of a redeemed Africa, with her dotted cities, with her beautiful civilization, with her millions of happy children, going to and fro. Why should I lose hope, why should I give up and take a back place in this age of progress? Remember that you are men, that God created you Lords of this creation. Lift up your selves, men, take yourselves out of the mire and hitch your hopes to the stars; yes, rise as high as the very stars themselves. Let no man pull you down, let no man destroy your ambition, because man is but your companion, your equal; man is your brother; he is not your lord; he is not your sovereign master.

We of the Universal Negro Improvement Association feel happy; we are cheerful. Let them connive to destroy us; let them organize to destroy us; we shall fight the more. Ask me personally the cause of my success, and I say opposition; oppose me, and I fight the more, and if you want to find out the sterling worth of the Negro, oppose him, and under the leadership of the Universal Negro Improvement Association he shall fight his way to victory, and in the days to come, and I believe not far distant, Africa shall reflect a splendid demonstration of the worth of the Negro, of the determination of the Negro, to set himself free and to establish a government of his own.
Garveyism is an upshot of the Great World War. It sprang forth amidst the wild currents of national, racial and class hatreds and prejudices stirred and unleashed by the furious flames of battle. Under the strains and stresses of conflict, the state power and institutions of the ruling peoples were mobilized. The intelligentsia of the Central Powers apotheosized “Mittel Europa,” Kultur, the Baghdad Railroad, and hurled imprecations upon the heads of the ungodly Entente. So, in turn, the high priests of morals and propaganda of the holy Allies sang a hymn of hate to the tune of the “Hun.”

“Britannia, Britannia rules the waves. Britons will ne’er be slaves,” “self determination of smaller nationalities,” “revanche, Italia irridenta,” “100 per cent Americanism,” “we are fighting to make the world safe for democracy,” “Deutschland Uber Alles,” “Pan-Slavism,” etc., were the psychological armor and spear of Armageddon. Add to this psychic complex of blatant, arrogant and hypocritic alchauvinism the revolutionary, proletarian internationalism of the Russian Revolution: “no annexations, no punitive indemnities and self-determination for smaller nationalities,” and it is at once apparent how nationalisms, racialisms and classisms, strangled and repressed in the cruel and brutal grip of imperialism, under the magic and galvanic stimulant of such moving slogans, would struggle to become more articulate, more defiant, more revolutionary.

The Easter Rebellion of Seinn Feinism, in 1916; Mahatma Gandhi non-co-operative philosophy of outraged India; Mustafa Kemal Pasha’s adamant stand at Angora in the Levant, battling for a conquering, militant Pan Islamism; the erratic vagaries of d’Annunzio for a re-united Italy; together with the rumblings of unrest in Egypt and among other oppressed peoples, attest to the manner in which the war quickened the vison of hitherto adjudged backward peoples, and set free forces making for the overthrow of the institutions and the abolition of the conditions that gave it (the war) birth. Indeed, the war was fruitful of paradoxes. Movements grew both for and against the interest of society. Imperialism and revolution faced each other. The Kremlin and the Quai d’Orsay of the worker and capitalist, respectively, seemed to grow in power. Movements grotesque and sound, appear to flourish and decay for the nonce.

“Past Experience Gives Shipping a Gloomy Outlook,” says, “that only one-fourth of the Governments ships are in operation, and there is about 33 per cent of the tonnage tied up in the world.’ He further makes this significant statement: “On June 30, 1914, there were 45.4 million gross tons of Steamers in the world; today there are close to 54.8 million tons, a 20 per cent increase. On the other hand, the quantity at cargo moving is one-fourth less than in 1913, as has been proved by a compilation of imports and exports of twenty leading countries. A number of fine craft are being laid up and many more will have to follow, for at the figures at present ruling many voyages do not pay actual outgoing expenses, leaving nothing for interest and depreciation. (A citation of editorials during the years from 1897 to 1900 which he uses as typical of editorials of the shipping journals today.”)

In conclusion, he says, “that shipping is facing a long, severe depression with little chance of an upward movement for years.”

Such is the sober opinion of an expert of the shipping business,

In other words, today great shipping interests backed up with unlimited capital, with fleets of ships. (not makeshifts nor apologies) are hard put to it to make ends meet, on account of the supply of ships being greater than the demand. It is safe to say that no expert in the shipping business would advise even one with unlimited capital and skilled operators, to begin a brand new
shipping business today, or to continue one if it is possible to stop without incurring a greater loss than by continuing.

In view of the foregoing facts, it is difficult to understand how any group of alleged intelligent and honest Negroes can continue to hold out the hope to well-meaning but misguided Negroes that they will build a great fleet of ships, plying between America, the West Indies and Africa, carrying Negroes and their Cargo.

The shipping business is controlled by a Shipping Trust.

It is about as possible and necessary to maintain a fleet of ships for Negroes only, as it is to build and maintain a railroad alongside that of the Pennsylvania railroad for Negroes only.

This is the excuse for the Black Star Line according to Mr. Garvoy, as reported in the Negro World of Aug. 20, 1920:

“You know of the insults heaped upon Negro passengers on the steamships of other lines when those Negroes were able to secure passage on them. You know of the weeks and months they have been compelled to wait to secure passages from one place to another. The Black Star Line aims to remedy all this, but we must have ships, more and bigger ships.”

It might not be unkind to ask how many Negroes do or can make use of ocean travel?

Now as to the matter of empire.

First, what is the status of Africa today?

According to the International Relations Series, edited by G. Lowes Dickinson, the area of Africa is about 11,500,000 square miles, and its population about 170 millions. “By 1914 the whole continent, with the exception of Abyssinia (350,000 square miles and eight millions population) and Liberia (area 40,000 square miles, population two millions), had been subjected to the control and government of European states,” writes Dickinson. The following figures show what shares the various States took in this partition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>4,200,000</td>
<td>25,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>3,300,000</td>
<td>35,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany*</td>
<td>1,100,000</td>
<td>12,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>900,000</td>
<td>7,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>8,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>600,000</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>750,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
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</tbody>
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* (Now in the hands of Great Britain)

The foregoing figures will indicate just how much vacant, available territory exists in Africa today.

Since, then, there is no unclaimed land in Africa, the logical question to ask is: how does one expect to build an empire there?

Here again, we will let the chief spokesman of Garveyism speak. Says he, on August 20, 1921, according to the Negro World, its official organ:

“It falls to your lot to tear off the shackles that bind Mother Africa. Can you do it? (Cries of ‘Yes! Yes!’) You did it in the Revolutionary War; you did it in the Civil War; you did it in the Battle of the Marne; you did it at Verdun; you did it in Mesopotamia; you did it in Togoland, in German East Africa, and you can do it marching up the battle heights of Africa.”

At this point it will be logical and sane to examine the relative power of the forces that
control Africa and of those that propose conquering it, in order to ascertain the folly or wisdom of the enterprise.

The aforementioned powers are equipped with big dreadnoughts, submarines, aeroplanes and great armies. In modern warfare Lewisite Gas is said to be capable of destroying entire cities. Aeroplanes have been built that can carry a half-ton gas bomb. Modern artillery was instrumental in producing a deathlist in the great world war of nearly 10,000,000, together with nearly 30,000,000 wounded. The imperialists nation in Africa control all of the deathdealing engines of power.

The very fact that the great European powers have fought to conquer Africa, is pretty good evidence that they don’t intend surrendering it to the cry of “Africa for the Africans.” Thus, it means war to the death against the formidable armies and navies of the great powers in Africa. The Garvey forces haven’t a single fighting craft. They have no military organization; no military or naval leadership. How, then, can Negroes conquer Africa? Someone says, “We will take the arms from the white man.” This, I submit, is not the most reassuring and delightful task.

But, it is apparently understood that the Negroes’ conquering Africa is a mere dream. For proclaims the leader:

“All of us might not live to see the higher accomplishment of an African empire so strong and powerful, as to compel the respect of all mankind, but we in our lifetime can so work and so act, as to make the dream a possibility within another generation.”

Loss of hope appears in the distance.

A word about the value of Garveyism to Negroes today. It has done some splendid things. It has inculcated into the minds of Negroes the need and value of organization. It has also demonstrated the ability of Negroes to come together in large masses under Negro leadership. Of course, the A.M.E. Church has done as much; so have the Negro Secret Orders. Garveyism, also, has conducted wholesome, vital, necessary and effective criticism on Negro leadership. It has stimulated the pride of Negroes in Negro history and traditions, thereby helping to break down the slave psychology which throttles and strangles Negro initiative, self-assertiveness, ambition, courage, independence, etc. It has further stiffened the Negro’s backbone to resist the encroachments and insults of white people. Again, it has emphasized the international character of the Negro problem. As a propaganda organization, at one period of its history, it was highly useful in awakening Negro consciousness to the demand of the times.

But its business operations, as exposed by Dr. Du Bois, to which I have not as yet seen a convincing reply, have not been conceived altogether in harmony with approved, modern business economics. That Negroes should develop business enterprises is correct. To this there can be no intelligent objection. But the kind, at certain times, seems to me to be highly material. Also, that Garveyism has stimulated Negro business initiative, no fair-minded person will gainsay.

But the crux of Garveyism is the redemption of Africa, the building of an African Empire. This can not be defended as an immediate program of the Negro, in the light of modern world politics. The slogan “Africa for the Africans” no Negro, or for that matter liberal white man will oppose; but “back to Africa” for the conquest of Africa is a different song.

The white mobocratic South, with its Tom Watsons, Cole Bleases, and John Williamses could not wish for a better ally than Garveyism, at this time. How is that, you ask?

It has been a recognized form of strategy of the ruling class in every country that whenever the discontent of the working people became a menace to them (the ruling class) that they (the ruling class) either started a war of aggression or invited a war of invasion. This was done to divert the alienation of the masses from the causes of their poverty and misery at home to some
Imaginary foreign enemy. Witness the old Nobility of Russia today urging an invasion of their own country by foreign powers. During the Revolution in France 1789 to 1793, the old Feudal aristocracy invited the invasion of France by foreign nations.

In America, the problem of the Negro is a labor problem. Negroes constitute a laboring element. Unrest is widespread among them, even in the South. Radical white labor groups are reported to be calling to them. Washington, Chicago, Arkansas and Tulsa race riots show that Negroes are discontented and are ready to strike back. The increasing demand of Negroes for the abolition of the Jim-crow car, disfranchisement, lynching; the insistence of a small minority for every right, even social equality; the trend of Negroes into labor unions: the activities of Negroes in the Socialist movement—all indicate the birth of a new consciousness.

Now to divert the Negroes’ mind away from these fundamental problems is to weaken them and strengthen the Bourbon forces of the Negro-hating South and the exploiting capitalists of America.

This is why there is no opposition to the demonstrations of Garveyism, either in parades or public mass meetings in the Armory or Madison Square Garden.

Negro Socialists, on the other hand, are thwarted in their every attempt to conduct public educational meetings, and parades would be out of the question. The cry would go up: Anarchists, they want to overthrow the government by violence! Such is the smoke screen used to suffocate real radicalism.

The whites in America don’t take Garveyism seriously. They dub Garvey a “Moses of the Negro” in order to get Negroes to follow him, which will wean them away from any truly radical economic program. They know that the achievement of his program, the redemption of Africa is unattainable, but it serves the purpose of engaging the Negroes’ brains, energy and funds in a highly nebulous, futile and doubtful movement so far as beneficial results to Negroes are concerned.

Think of the solution of Garveyism for the present wave of unemployment!

Says Mr. Garvey in a recent speech, according to the Negro World:

“If you are employed by white men and they choose to dismiss you because of color tell him, ‘Brother, you remember the last war: all right, another one may come.’ That is your trump card. You are not begging for jobs; you demand jobs because you made it possible for them to live in peace (Cheers), otherwise the Germans would have been at their door. You have a fair exchange for the money that is given to you. Let them know this: that your future service depends upon their present good treatment.”

This is doubtless a rejoinder to the charge brought against the movement, viz., that when Negroes applied at certain business, or industrial plants for work, they were told to go to Mr. Garvey, the Negro King.

While it is absurd to charge Garvey with the plight of the Negro in the country today; yet what individual with the slightest conception of industrial problems, would accept the aforesaid statement of Mr. Garvey as a remedy for the Negroes’ unemployment? It is not only childish, but it accentuates, and complicates the Negroes’ difficulties by making the question of unemployment an issue as between white and black men, when, in fact, it is a product of the capitalist system which brings about overproduction at certain cycles, and consequent unemployment of workers regardless of race, creed, nationality or color. In very truth, a strikingly anti-white man doctrine is both unsound and dangerous. For it is false to assume that all white men are agreed upon a program of opposition to Negroes. The dominant groups in America, as in other parts of the world, are class groups. All white men are not in harmony with respect to human action and
human institutions. The Great World War demonstrated that. Debs in jail is also proof as strong as “holy writ.” Strikes and lockouts on the industrial field indicate a difference of class interests within the same race. Also the fights between Negro tenants and Negro landlords show that even Negroes may have different interests. In fact, the interests of a Negro tenant and white tenant are more in common than the interests between white tenants and white landlords or Negro tenants and Negro landlords.

Thus, Garveyism broadens the chasm between the black and white workers, and can only result in the creation of more race hatred which will periodically flare up into race riots.

However, with the elimination of the African program, the “Negro First” doctrine, the Black Star Line, the existing organization of Garveyism may be directed into some useful channel.

The Negro public is facing so serious a period that it should demand that the different schools of Negro thought come before it and present their programs. The programs should be examined and criticized by the Negro public so that it might accept or reject according to the merits or demerits of the different schools.

It was, indeed, astounding to read the following part of a resolution adopted on the Pan-African Congress meeting in Paris, at a public meeting of the U.N.I.A.:

“That we believe the motives of the congress are to undermine the true feeling and sentiment of the Negro race for complete freedom in their own spheres and for a higher social order among themselves, as against a desire among a certain class of Negroes for social contact, comradeship and companionship with the white race.

“We further repudiate the congress because we sincerely feel that the white race, like the black and yellow races, should maintain the purity of self, and that the congress is nothing more than an effort to encourage race suicide by the admixture of two opposite races.

“That the said W.E.B. DuBois and his associates, who called the congress, are making an issue of social equality with the white race for their own selfish purposes and not for the advancement of the Negro race.”

Now, certainly, no one will accuse the MESSENGER of any bias in favor of Dr. DuBois. But here the Negro is faced with the rejection of a principle which has been the ardent hope of the South since Reconstruction—the principle of social equality. Can Negroes accept the stigma of inferiority upon the pretext of keeping the stock pure? By the way, no anthropologist, worthy of the name, would advocate the purity of ethnic groups by preventing miscegenation.

Further, to reject and condemn a principle on the ground that some one is using it to selfish ends, is as sensible as it would be to oppose the teaching of writing to Negro youth, because it has been used for forgery or that those who lynch Negroes use it. The issue is the value of an instrument for the achievement of certain ends. To reject social equality is to accept the Jim-crow car, disfranchisement, lynching, etc. Without social equality the Negro will ever remain a political and economic serf.

Garveyism is spiritual; the need now, however, is a Negro renaissance in scientific thought.
Additional Resources

“Not included in this kit

Harlem Renaissance


Great Migration


*Migration Series by Jacob Lawwrence*, slides. Davis Art Images.

W.E.B. DuBois


Marcus Garvey


Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework

This packet has been designed with the following organizational structure from the Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Frameworks as a guide:

**CORE CONCEPT:** Learning in, through and about the arts develops understanding of the creative process and appreciation of the importance of creative work.

**Strand I: Creating and Performing**

Lifelong learners:
- LS 1. Use the arts to express ideas, feelings, and beliefs.
- LS 2. Acquire and apply the essential skills of each art form.

**Strand II: Thinking and Responding**

Lifelong learners:
- LS 3. Communicate how they use imaginative and reflective thinking during all phases of creating and performing.
- LS 4. Respond analytically and critically to their own work and that of others.

**Strand III: Connecting and Contributing**

Lifelong learners:
- LS 5. Make the connections between the arts and other disciplines.
- LS 6. Investigate the cultural and historical contexts of the arts.
- LS 7. Explore the relationship between arts, media and technology.
- LS 8. Contribute to the community’s cultural and artistic life.

It was our goal to provide examples that will help you begin exploring the Harlem Renaissance through an interdisciplinary approach. We hope that you will build upon each of the suggested ideas and activities as you introduce the Harlem Renaissance to your students.