

# Poetry and Music of the Harlem Renaissance and Today

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## Overview

This curriculum unit, intended for a ninth- or tenth-grade English class, will focus on the poetry and music of the Harlem Renaissance. In this unit, my students and I will look at poetry by Harlem Renaissance writers (e.g., Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Gwendolyn Bennett), and some younger poets (e.g., Margaret Walker), as expressions of a cultural movement whose goals are articulated in documents like Alain Locke's "The New Negro" (1925). We will also look at poetry by contemporary African-American activist writers such as June Jordan, Sonia Sanchez, Audre Lorde and Essex Hemphill, comparing these writers' goals and themes to those of the Harlem Renaissance-era poets. Similarly, my students and I will look at the common (and sometimes different) goals and topics of Harlem Renaissance-era blues and current rap music, both of which assertively "tell it like it is" and sometimes articulate social protest.

## Rationale

Like many language arts teachers, I would like my students to experience writing as an act that accomplishes something in the world. I believe that they need to write for real, clearly-imagined audiences in order to change the way those audiences think and act, and of course I also want them to read literature that exemplifies these qualities. The genres of poetry and music are obvious choices for accomplishing these curricular goals, not only because they are highly engaging, but also because most of us tend to accept that poems and songs have both aesthetic values and "messages" for their audience. Although I don't want to reduce the poems on my reading list to simplistic "messages," I think I

can and should teach them within the context of broad progressive agendas shared by African-American writers of their respective time periods. In addition, both the Harlem Renaissance-era works and the contemporary pieces clearly and compellingly address particular audiences – audiences that include my students and their community.

The approach I have outlined will also enable me to teach students that the Harlem Renaissance was not a brief, one-time heyday of Black writing, and indeed not even a purely literary phenomenon, but rather that it was one flowering of an ongoing cultural and political movement for Black people's equality, self-expression and freedom that continues today. Instead of teaching about the Harlem Renaissance as something that happened "back in the day," this unit will make the era come alive for students by relating it to current poetry and music. Ultimately, I hope the unit will challenge students to think of themselves as the modern-day equivalent of the Harlem Renaissance's "New Negroes," and to consider as thoughtfully as those authors did what their generation's contribution and goals should be.

This unit is intended for ninth- or tenth-grade English classes. I would expect students participating in this unit to be able to reflect critically in writing and discussion on abstract themes like empowerment, oppression and beauty. It would be helpful if most students in the class had middle-school level experience in reading and analyzing poetry both for content and form. However, ninth- and tenth-graders at lower skill levels, or older high school students with more experience, could also profitably engage with this unit at their respective levels. The unit will cover most, if not all, of the literary terms and devices that are taught in the ninth- and tenth-grade poetry units in the School District of Philadelphia's English Core Curriculum, and thus can be used as a more in-depth substitute for that segment of the year in either course.

Please note that I have created this unit with my own students and my own school in mind, which means that I am assuming classes that are 99% African-American. There is no reason that the unit would not be effective in classrooms with different demographics, but teachers may need to adjust the wording of certain assignments and discussion questions that assume the respondents are African-American.

### **Objectives and Strategies**

Students will respond to the poems and music in this unit both in prose journals and by writing their own poems using similar forms and themes. Their responses to the readings will focus not only on the content of the works, but also on their form and diction. Some of the poets we will read use traditional poetic forms (as in Cullen and Walker's sonnets), while others use more informal styles. Taken as a group, these poems are also bidialectal, employing both Standard English and African-American vernacular English.

Students will learn to identify and use the poetic forms and devices that they read, and to develop their ability to “code-switch” as writers and speakers. In support of the last-mentioned objective, students will also be required to memorize and perform poetry and/or raps – including both published texts and their own writing – in class, or perhaps even in a school assembly.

To summarize, students will complete the following assignments, assessments and performance tasks in the course of this unit:

1. Journal: Students will write journal entries of at least one page in response to each cluster of poems that we read (i.e., a group of poems on a common theme). Journal entries will usually be assigned after students have read and discussed the poems in class. However, the journal could also be used for “quickwrites” to get students thinking about a topic before reading and/or to help them organize their responses before participating in discussion.
2. Glossary of literary terms: Students will maintain a glossary of poetic devices and other terms covered in the course of reading the poems and song lyrics, including definitions and examples. Depending on the students’ ability to retain and assimilate this information, the teacher may also decide to test students on the definitions.
3. Portfolio of original poetry: Each student will write one original poem on each topic, or in response to a poem from each segment of the unit. The assignment for each poem will include a topic to address and a poetic device and/or element of form to incorporate, at a minimum; there may also be specific requirements as to audience, speaker, etc. At the end of the unit, students will choose two of the poems they have written and solicit feedback on their drafts from their teacher and peers. They will then revise and edit their poems and prepare polished copies for publication in a class anthology.
4. Recitations: Each student will choose a poem from the syllabus to memorize and recite for the class. In preparing the poems for performance, students will be required to pay attention to the poet’s/speaker’s use of Standard English and/or African-American Vernacular English and to adjust their pronunciation, inflection and body language accordingly.
5. Essay: Each student will write a literary essay focusing on at least two poems that address a common theme. One poem may be chosen from the syllabus; the other must be found elsewhere. Students will analyze the poems for content, form and diction and will compare and contrast each poet’s approach to the common theme.

This unit encompasses all of the skills addressed in the Pennsylvania literacy standards: reading, writing, speaking & listening. In particular, it will require students to learn and use the conventions of a literary genre (standard 1.2.B.); to understand literary devices and poetic language (standards 1.3.C and D); to analyze authors’ use of formal

and informal American English (standard 1.7.B.); and to participate in group discussions and presentations (1.6.E.).

### **Classroom activities**

The unit will begin with a brief introduction, orienting students to the historical context and the concerns that activated the writers of the New Negro Renaissance. Following the introduction, the unit will be made up of clusters of poems (and sometimes song lyrics and/or supplementary non-fiction texts) organized around specific themes. These themes are *not* intended as an exhaustive catalogue of topics addressed by poets, either during the Harlem Renaissance or in the contemporary period. The topics I have selected are in keeping with my goal, as described above under “Rationale,” of presenting the Harlem Renaissance to students as a progressive, anti-racist social and political movement.

In the section below, I will provide the following information about each cluster of poems: 1) a short introduction to the topic; 2) a tentative list of poems and other texts to be used; 3) some thoughts about how I would approach each poem or small group of poems in the classroom, including discussion and journal questions I might pose and elements of form or poetic devices that I would teach about; and 4) an assignment for writing an original poem on the topic under discussion. Please note that neither the choices of texts indicated here nor the discussion questions should be seen as fixed and unchangeable; I have no doubt that I will make changes as I implement this unit in the classroom, and I am sure other teachers using this unit will do the same. The most important elements of this section are the topics I have chosen and the overall structure of each cluster.

### **Introduction**

In their introduction to the “revisionist Harlem Renaissance anthology” *Double-Take* (2001), Venetria Patton and Maureen Honey describe the event that is “now known as the official beginning of the Harlem Renaissance”:

On March 21, 1924, almost all of the future stars of the Harlem Renaissance gathered at Manhattan’s Civic Club to inaugurate what would become known as the New Negro Movement of the 1920s and 1930s. This event was a dinner arranged to honor Jessie Fauset for the publication of her first novel, *There is Confusion* [...] Poet Gwendolyn Bennett wrote her poem “To Usward” especially for the occasion and recited it that evening. In the audience receiving a round of applause was the most

famous black woman poet of her day, Georgia Douglas Johnson [...] [T]he evening's literary centerpiece [was] a poetry reading by rising star Countee Cullen. The most influential black power broker of the era, Alain Locke, was master of ceremonies... (p. xix)

Ideally, I'd like to take my students back in time to participate in this event. Failing that, I plan to find a way to recreate some aspects of the experience in our classroom, perhaps by finding volunteers among my colleagues or among older students to record a fictionalized re-enactment on audio or videotape.

My objective in this introduction will be to set the scene of the Harlem or New Negro Renaissance, in terms of geography, historical context and personalities. Geographically, students should realize that Harlem was and is an integral part of Manhattan, not an isolated island; they should also realize that other regions of the country were important to the "Harlem" Renaissance: the honorees came from Philadelphia and the South, not just New York. Historically, they should be able to situate the beginnings of this movement in the period after World War I and before the Depression, and certainly well before the Civil Rights Movement (which is as far "back in the day" as many of my students tend to imagine when contemplating Black history). Meanwhile, the notable names in the quotation above provide a reasonable introductory "Who's Who in the New Negro Movement."

In addition to providing basic information about each participant in our re-enactment (whatever form it may take), I would make sure to emphasize certain points about those who were part of this literary and social movement. First, despite a tendency of their contemporaries and of scholars since then to downplay or ignore women's participation (Patton and Honey xix-xxi), female writers were prominent and celebrated members of the movement. Second, gay and lesbian writers played a central role in the Harlem Renaissance; Cullen and Locke are important not only for their own work, but for their support of both male and female poets writing about same-sex love (Honey 22). Both of these points are still valid today; in this unit, students will become acquainted with contemporary African-American poets of both genders and various sexual orientations, all of whom are leaders in the ongoing movement against Black people's oppression.

Once students have "met" some of the key players in the movement they will be learning about, they will work in groups to read some contemporary essays that introduce some of the goals and concerns of these writers and activists. Students will read excerpts (adapted, if students' reading level is low) from Alain Locke's "The New Negro," A.

Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen's "The New Negro – What is He?" and Marion Vera Cuthbert's "Problems Facing Negro Young Women." I will provide directed questions for each piece to help each group identify the historical context, social and economic issues cited by the author as important to African-Americans at the time. Once these lists are complete and shared with the class, I will ask students to make up their own parallel lists for our own times: What are the key historical markers, social and economic issues that define African-American life today? After we compare the two lists, I will wrap up this portion of the unit by making two points. First, literature is not divorced from history and politics; the social issues that we have just identified were very much in the minds of Harlem Renaissance writers, and contemporary social issues are always in the minds of today's poets and writers. Second, African-Americans have *always* been engaged in the process of thinking about, writing about and responding to social conditions both in their community and in the wider world; this process did not begin and end with the Harlem Renaissance. This will be made evident in our unit, which bridges their time and ours; but students should keep in mind that the "new" sensibility of the 1920s and 1930s was not an entirely new phenomenon.

#### Cluster #1: Still We Rise – African-American Empowerment

Beginning with two poets featured at the "kick-off to a movement" dinner that we revisited in our introductory activity, we will read a few examples of the many poems African-Americans have written to celebrate their people's survival and to rally them for the ongoing struggle to live well in a hostile society. The energy of these selections will communicate to students the sense of self-awareness and self-determination that characterized the New Negro Renaissance and that has been carried forward by many Black artists since then.

I will begin this section of the unit with Georgia Douglas Johnson's short poem "The Suppliant." This piece will function as a kind of warm-up, since it is brief and straightforward. However, it is an excellent example of the spirit of the early Harlem Renaissance, with its rejection of "the patient, futile prayer my fathers prayed before" to gain entry to mainstream society: "The strong demand, contend, prevail; the beggar is a fool!" The journal entry for this poem will focus on this line and ask students to agree or disagree with it, explaining their reasons. As we read "The Suppliant," I will introduce several procedures for reading and understanding poems that we will use throughout the unit: 1) skimming a piece to find unfamiliar vocabulary words, which we will then define together before reading; 2) breaking down a poem into sections and paraphrasing

each “chunk”; 3) drawing on the title and relevant lines of the poem to articulate the theme.

We will then read Gwendolyn Bennett’s “To Usward,” starting by talking about the made-up word in the title and discussing what Bennett might have had in mind. As with all the selections we read, I will instruct students to skim the poem for unfamiliar vocabulary words; we’ll define these words (with students taking notes on the poem itself) before we start reading. After reading the poem aloud, I will ask students to jot down a couple of words or a phrase, their own or from the poem, that come to mind; we’ll share these aloud and (as students elaborate on their answers) begin constructing some initial responses to the poem. The next step will be to help students divide the poem into “stanzas” or sections, using punctuation, meaning and rhyme to find the natural breaks; we can then paraphrase and discuss each chunk of the poem (including charting the rhyme scheme). To help students visualize the primary metaphor of sealed ginger jars, I will display some bottled preserves (of ginger, if possible) and encourage them to think about why Bennett compared herself and her people to these jars. I will point out that in this poem, articulating the theme is made easier by the poet’s dedication – “to all Negro Youth known and unknown who have a song to sing, a story to tell or a vision for the sons of earth” – and we will search in the poem for lines that flesh out Bennett’s charge to this audience. In their journals, students will create a simile or symbol for their own generation like Bennett’s ginger jars, and explain why it is apt for themselves and their peers. Students will begin their glossary of terms with the words *simile* and *rhyme scheme*, with examples from “To Usward.”

We will follow this opening with a pair of poems from different eras: Sterling A. Brown’s “Strong Men,” paired with Maya Angelou’s “Still I Rise.” (I would point out to students that Angelou used one of Georgia Douglas Johnson’s titles, *The Heart of a Woman*, as the title of one of the volumes of her own autobiography.) Angelou’s poem will offer an opportunity to reinforce the definitions of simile (“like dust, I’ll rise”) and rhyme scheme. With both poems, again, we will define any unfamiliar vocabulary words in advance; I will teach the term “epigraph” for the Carl Sandburg quotation (“The strong men keep coming on”) that begins Brown’s poem, and ask students to look for when and how Brown uses and expands on this quotation. Brown’s poem, with its interspersed quotations of blues and folk song lyrics, will offer the first opportunity to raise the issue of African American Vernacular English (“Ebonics”) as it is used in African-American poetry; for now, we will simply note that there are two language registers used here and highlight where and how Brown uses each one.

Our focus as we read and discuss these two poems will be on 1) noticing how each poet uses *repetition* (a new term for the glossary) to create a coherent structure; 2) noticing similarities between the two pieces (e.g., the introduction of a rhetorical question towards the end of each poem that highlights whites' discomfort with Blacks' "sassiness" and laughter); and 3) discussing the effect of the different choices Angelou and Brown made. For example, Brown refers to oppressive whites as "they" and African-American men as "you," with stanzas made up of litanies of what "they" did to "you," interrupted by snatches of songs that "you" sang in response. Angelou's poem, by contrast, is in the first person, directly addressing the oppressor as "you." How does the difference in the identity of "you" affect the way we read each poem (and how does that change depending on who "we" are)? We will also look at differences in the content of what Brown's "strong men" must endure vs. what Angelou's speaker endures, and discuss the possible effects of gender and historical context on the poets' ideas. In the course of this discussion, we will define and add to students' glossary the terms *stanza* and *speaker*. Students will write in their journals about the power of "laughing at" those who attempt to oppress you.

Other poems may be included in this cluster as time and classroom dynamics dictate. Jessie Fauset's "Oriflamme," Margaret Walker's "For My People" and/or "The Struggle Staggers Us," and Audre Lorde's "Call" would all fit under the rubric of empowerment. The final assignment for this segment of the unit will be to write an original poem whose theme is empowerment of African-Americans. The poem must be at least 12 lines long; it must use a regular rhyme scheme and *either* a simile *or* repetition. Students may choose to address African-Americans (or a sub-group, e.g. young people, women, men, singers/rappers, etc.) directly or to address a different group; they may choose to speak for themselves or on behalf of "the race."

## Cluster #2: Black is beautiful...right?? – Criticizing Eurocentric beauty standards

As many observers have pointed out, all of us are barraged with media images of beauty that do not reflect the real bodies of most real people. This is a problem for all of us, but especially for girls and women of color: Eurocentric and racist beauty standards prevail in the media, so that the few African-American women who are held up as models of beauty tend to be light-skinned with long, straight hair. Although many teenagers today are apparently savvy about this issue and can articulate the points that I have just made, most of them are far from immune to the effects of racist and "color-struck" arbiters of good looks. The following cluster of poems will provide examples from our own time and the Harlem Renaissance era of Black women (and one man) who have struggled against these pernicious effects in their writing. These poets have produced strong critiques of Eurocentric beauty standards and powerful affirmations of Black people's



innate beauty. Although this issue arguably affects young women disproportionately, due to the sexist tendency to value women primarily for our looks (and devalue us more thoroughly for being “ugly”), we are also realizing increasingly that young men are also harmed by unrealistic and narrowly-defined ideal body images. It is harder to find texts about this aspect of the issue, but we will talk about this imbalance and the reasons for it during this segment of the unit; and the topic of how African-American men’s images are distorted will be addressed in a later cluster of poems.

We will begin this segment with a “quickwrite” in students’ journals (i.e., teacher reads prompts aloud and gives a few minutes to respond to each one): Students will be asked to write about a time when they were made to feel ugly and unloveable, or made someone else feel that way. What about you/that person was labeled as ugly?... How were you/the other person made to feel ugly about yourself/him- or herself?... What, if any, were the long-term effects of this incident?... Students share with a partner, then read aloud as desired. This writing activity will serve to introduce this segment of the unit and the first poem, a contemporary piece by Sonia Sanchez titled “Song #3 (for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade sisters).” Before reading aloud, have students skim – this time not looking for unfamiliar vocabulary but noticing anything unusual about the way the poem is written. Students should pick up on Sanchez’ use of African-American Vernacular English/Ebonics for her little girl speaker’s voice. Have students circle, identify and “translate” features that differ from Standard English, including grammar and pronunciation (indicated by spelling). (If students identify lack of capitalization, point out that Sanchez’ and many other poets’ Standard English poems also use unconventional capitalization, which is not a feature of spoken Ebonics.) Ask students what their initial reaction is to seeing a published poem using this kind of language and why they think the poet might have chosen to do so.

After we read “Song #3” aloud, we will discuss the speaker’s self-image. What does this little girl think of herself? Where did she “learn” to think this way? (Notice that she is very specific about what makes her ugly; did someone point these things out to her?) Does the poem suggest that the little girl’s poor self-image is partly/mostly about being Black, and/or partly/mostly about other factors? What would it mean to the girl if she could hear someone say “looka here. a pretty little black girl lookin just like me”? As students respond to these questions, I will push them to ground their answers in specific details from the poem and to provide line numbers when they cite these details. For their journal topic on this poem, students may choose any one of the discussion questions I have just listed, including those about Sanchez’ use of Ebonics in her poem.

Before moving on to the next poem, I will ask students to describe the structure and rhyme scheme of Sanchez' poem; to provide a bridge to the next piece, our first task will be to analyze it in the same ways. I will point out to students that the four-line stanza (as used in "Still I Rise" and in "Song #3") is the most common in formal poetry in English, but that the next few poems we read will break away from this format, using 2- or 3-line stanzas (or, in one short piece, none at all).

The second poem we read in this segment will be Jessie Fauset's "Touché," which examines the presence of internalized racism in adult relationships. In addition to defining unfamiliar vocabulary, we will read this poem aloud from beginning to end once, then return to the beginning and pause after each stanza to discuss what the speaker has revealed and our reactions. I will guide the conversation along these lines: Who is the speaker, and who is she talking to? What do you think is the answer to her question in the fourth stanza (she asks her lover why he constantly dwells on the color of her hair)? When the speaker says she has "divined" the answer, what exactly has she figured out about what her lover is thinking? What is her response? Do you think she is telling the truth when she claims "'tis little I care"? Do you think these two people care about each other? As always, we will look at the title of the poem (I will explain the origins of the expression "touché" in fencing) and discuss what it tells us about the speaker's view of the conversation recorded here. Students will write in their journals about the ways in which the "blond-haired, blue-eyed" standard of beauty affects the relationship in this poem, and whether/how it affects relationships they or their peers have been involved in.

The last two poems of this segment are both "interventions" of a sort. Anita Scott Coleman's "Black Faces" takes on the task of revaluing Black beauty, while Essex Hemphill's "Soft Targets" imagines a man nailing Barbie doll heads to telephone poles and setting them aflame as a way of protesting the fact that "Barbie never told Black girls / they are beautiful." Before reading "Black Faces," I will show students a picture representing a racist stereotype from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the extra-dark-skinned, thick-lipped, eye-rolling minstrel figure. I'll provide some context for the picture (where it came from, who produced it, who viewed it, etc.) and ask students to identify which aspects of (stereo-)typically African-American appearance are being distorted and made to seem ugly. We'll then read Coleman's "Black Faces," with its beautiful and loving references to dark skin, white eyes and full lips, and discuss the poet's purpose. I will ask students to describe how Coleman uses simile and repetition to reinforce her point. (If time allows and/or if students seem to need reinforcement, this poem could be followed up with Effie Lee Newsome's "The Bronze Legacy (To a Brown Boy)" or one of Langston Hughes' lullabies.)

Turning to “Soft Targets,” I will point out that Hemphill’s two- or three-line “stanzas” are really just sentences broken in half and written on more than one line; there is no rhyme in this piece. Students will add the definition of *free verse* and an example from this poem to their glossaries. I will emphasize that this style is a good choice when you want to be very straightforward, if you do not like writing rhymed verse, or when you are stuck: simply write your thoughts down in prose form and break each sentence into lines for an “instant” poem. The poem’s style and content are easy to understand, and I might assign this piece for independent work rather than discussing it as a class, asking students to explain in writing 1) what the man in the poem is doing and why; and 2) how a Barbie doll can “tell” Black girls anything. The journal topic for “Soft Targets” and “Black Faces” will ask students to evaluate whether, how, and why Coleman’s poem and/or the actions of Hemphill’s “outlaw spook terrorist” could help Black people.

Before assigning the original poem that will end this segment of the unit. I will ask students to turn back to the quickwrite they did before reading Sanchez’ poem. On the same page as their reflections about feeling ugly, I will ask them to jot down some memories of a time when they felt beautiful or handsome. Who made them feel that way? What about their appearance were they most pleased with (skin, hair, clothes, height, facial hair...)? Students will then choose one of these two quickwrites to expand into a poem. Again, the poem must be at least 12 lines long; it should be written *without* rhyme. Students should consciously choose and consistently maintain either an Ebonics or a Standard English register for their poem, depending on who the speaker is.

#### Outlines of additional segments

Unfortunately, space and time do not permit me to describe each segment of the unit in as much detail as I have provided for the first two. I will conclude this section with a list of additional topics that I plan to include in the unit, with titles of poems to be read and discussed in each cluster.

Cluster #3: It’s Hard Out There – Challenges facing Black men.

Introduce cluster with excerpts from news reports about the so-called “war on Black men” and statistics about incarceration, unemployment and homicide rates for young African-American men.

Poems to include:

- Essex Hemphill, “American Hero” and “Cordon Negro”
- Arna Bontemps, “A Black Man Talks of Reaping”
- June Jordan, “Unemployment Monologue”
- Helene Johnson, “Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem”

- Sterling A. Brown, “Sam Smiley”

Topics to discuss and write about:

- Stereotyping/Ghettoizing of Black men in sports
- Exclusion from the labor market
- Suffering and perpetrating violence
- Internalizing/rejecting racist and ageist stereotypes

Consider inviting a representative from an African-American men’s organization to address class and discuss local initiatives.

Cluster #4: Old heads, crackheads and others – Looking beneath the surface

Introduction: Students write brief description of someone they have seen, or regularly see, on the street who strikes them as old and decrepit, strung out, “out there,” or otherwise disreputable and hard on the eyes. Let them know that in this unit they will be reading poems that look beneath the surface of people like this, where poets try to find beauty in faces and bodies that have suffered, and that they will be writing a portrait like this of one of these people – so, in the next few days, start noticing these folks in a more careful and compassionate way.

Poems to include:

- Octavia Wymbush, “Beauty”
- Rita Dove, “Blown Apart By Loss...”
- Lucille Clifton, “miss rosie”
- Joyce Sims Carrington, “An Old Slave Woman”
- Claude McKay, “Harlem Shadows”

Cluster #5: Can’t live with ‘em, can’t live without ‘em – Troubled (and happy) relationships.

Poems to include:

- Nikki Giovanni (TBD)
- Countee Cullen, “Tableau”
- revisit Jessie Fauset’s “Touché”
- Sonia Sanchez, “Song #2”
- Georgia Douglas Johnson, “I Want to Die While You Love Me”
- ***more poems and song lyrics to come.***

Cluster #6: Resisting and making change.

Poems to include:

- June Jordan, “Poem About My Rights”
- Audre Lorde, “The Art of Response”
- Claude McKay, “If We Must Die”
- ***more poems and song lyrics to come.***

## **Bibliography for teachers**

Angelou, Maya. *Poems*. New York: Bantam Books, 1986.

**An anthology of Angelou's numerous books of poetry, including all of her best-known poems.**

Finch, Annie, ed. *A Formal Feeling Comes: Poems in Form by Contemporary Women*. Brownsville, OR: Story Line Press, 1994.

**Includes poems by Rita Dove, Sonia Sanchez and many more, with commentary from each poet on the issue of writing formal poetry (as opposed to free verse).**

Hemphill, Essex. *Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry*. New York: Plume, 1992.

**Poems and essays by a prominent African-American gay writer.**

Honey, Maureen. *Shadowed Dreams: Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996.

**Comprehensive anthology of women's poetry, organized thematically (Protest, Heritage, Love & Passion, Nature) and with an excellent introduction.**

Jordan, June. *Naming Our Destiny: New and Selected Poems*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1989.

**Definitive collection of work by this bold and outraged poet, ranging from 1958 to 1989.**

Lauter, Paul, ed. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature, Volume Two* (Third Edition). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

**Includes an excellent section on the New Negro Renaissance.**

Lorde, Audre. *Our Dead Behind Us*. New York: Norton, 1986.

**One of several essential titles by Lorde. *The Black Unicorn* is also useful.**

Patton, Venetria K. and Maureen Honey. *Double-Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

**The basic text for the unit. Includes essays, fiction, poetry and drama; excellent biographies of authors; helpful and wide-ranging introduction.**

Walker, Margaret. *This is My Century: New and Collected Poems*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989.

**Walker doesn't fit neatly into either the Harlem Renaissance period or the contemporary period, but her poems address themes that are important to this unit. This collection showcases poems in a wide variety of forms.**

## Student reading list

### *non-fiction*

- Locke, “The New Negro” (excerpted and/or adapted as needed)
- A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, “The New Negro – What is He?” (excerpted and/or adapted as needed)
- Cuthbert, “Problems Facing Negro Young Women” (excerpted and/or adapted as needed)

### *poetry (selections referenced in the unit are in **boldface**; others are supplementary and may be used for the essay assignment)*

- Langston Hughes, “Song for a Dark Girl,” “Freedom Train,” “I, Too,” “Harlem”
- Countee Cullen, “**Tableau**,” “Yet Do I Marvel,” “Incident”
- **Claude McKay**, “**If We Must Die**,” “**Harlem Shadows**”
- **Gwendolyn Bennett**, “**To Usward**”
- **Jessie Redmon Fauset**, “**Touché**,” “**Oriflamme**”
- **Sterling A. Brown**, “**Strong Men**,” “**Sam Smiley**”
- **Arna Bontemps**, “**A Black Man Talks of Reaping**”
- Gladys May Casely Hayford, “Palm Wine Seller”
- **Octavia Wynbush**, “**Beauty**”
- **Helene Johnson**, “**Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem**”
- **Georgia Douglas Johnson**, “**The Suppliant**,” “**I Want to Die While You Love Me**,” “**Motherhood**”
- **Anita Scott Coleman**, “**Black Faces**”
- **Joyce Sims Carrington**, “**The Old Slave Woman**”
- Effie Lee Newsome, “The Bronze Legacy (To a Brown Boy)”
- Margaret Walker, “For My People,” “The Struggle Staggers Us,” possibly one or two dialect poems (e.g. “Kissie Lee,” “Bad Man Stagolee”)
- **June Jordan**, “**Poem About My Rights**,” “**Unemployment Monologue**”
- **Maya Angelou**, “**Still I Rise**”
- **Essex Hemphill**, “**American Hero**,” “**Visiting Hours**,” “**Cordon Negro**,” “**Soft Targets**”
- Audre Lorde, “Sister Outsider,” “**The Art of Response**,” “Call”
- **Lucille Clifton**, “**miss rosie**”
- Sonia Sanchez, various haiku; “**Song No. 2**” and “**Song No. 3**”
- Nikki Giovanni (to be determined)
- **Rita Dove**, “**Blown Apart By Loss...**”
- [more contemporary male poets to be added]

### *music*

- Ida Cox, “Wild Women Don’t Have the Blues”
- Ma Rainey, “See See Rider”
- Blind Blake, “Third Degree Blues”

### **Materials for classroom use**

1. *Copies of the texts:* I recommend creating a photocopied reader for students that includes all of the poems and supplementary texts to be used in the unit. Students could then take notes directly on the poems and have them for home and school use, like a textbook.
2. *Journals for students:* These can be provided either by students or by the teacher.
3. *CD/tape player:* To be used for playing musical selections, and possibly also to aid students in rehearsing their recitations.
4. *Recordings of blues and hip-hop selections to be used.*
5. *Images of minstrels:* For use in Cluster #2, with “Black Faces.”
6. *Reenactment of 1924 Civic Club dinner:* I have yet to fully develop this piece, but an audio or video reenactment of this dinner would be helpful to introduce the unit (see above under “Introduction” in “Classroom Activities”).



## **Appendix: Pennsylvania literacy standards met by this unit**

1.1.11A Locate various texts, media and traditional resources for assigned and independent projects before reading.

1.2.11C 8Produce work in at least one literary genre that follows the conventions of the genre.

1.3.11A Read and understand works of literature.

1.3.11B Analyze and evaluate in poetry the appropriateness of diction and figurative language.

1.4.11A Write short stories, poems and plays.

1.4.11B Write complex informational pieces (e.g., research papers, analyses, evaluations, essays).

1.4.11D Maintain a written record of activities, course work, experience, honors and interests.

1.6.11C Speak using skills appropriate to formal speech situations.

1.6.11D Contribute to discussions.

1.6.11E Participate in small and large group discussions and presentations.