

Facilitation Guide



The Harlem Renaissance (Create a Blues Song) Social Studies Grades 9, 10, 11

EXPERIENCE OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students explore the Harlem Renaissance through visual art, informational texts, and Blues music. They analyze artwork and primary sources to understand the cultural and historical context of the era, then apply their learning by writing original lyrics in a traditional 12-bar Blues format and share their work in a classroom “Harlem Renaissance Salon.”

Standards

SOCIAL STUDIES

- 2.2c – Assess the impact of the Harlem Renaissance, the Great Migration, and Garveyism on the African American freedom movement.
- D1.4.9-12. – Explain how supporting questions contribute to an inquiry and how, through engaging source work, new compelling and supporting questions emerge.

CCSS:

- RI.9-10.7 – Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.
- W.9-10.3.d – Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

ARTS STANDARDS

- I:9-12:1 – Describe how interests, experiences, knowledge, and skills relate to personal choices and musical intentions when creating, performing, and responding to music.
- I:9-12:1 – Use a variety of media and methods, including available technology, to develop, present, explain, and document musical works with connections to context and artistic purpose

Getting Ready

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- Did the 1920s preserve the past or invent the future?
- How did the Great Migration set the stage for the Harlem Renaissance and the Black freedom movement?

OBJECTIVE:

- Students will analyze visual art, historical texts, and Blues music from the Harlem Renaissance and synthesize their learning by composing an original 12-bar Blues song that reflects the perspective, themes, and historical context of the time period.

ASSESSMENT:

- Original 12-Bar Blues song: Students demonstrate understanding through their lyrics, use of Blues structure, and their ability to explain how their song connects to the time period.

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Getting Ready

KEY VOCABULARY:

- Social studies: Harlem Renaissance, Jazz music, Langston Hughes, Louis Armstrong, Marcus Garvey, The New Negro, Ku Klux Klan, Billie Holiday, Chicago Defender, Duke Ellington, Great Migration, Salon
- Music: Blues, Form, Rhythm

MATERIALS/CLASSROOM SUGGESTIONS:

- Slides & Handouts
- Performance space

TEACHER BACKGROUND



VIDEO



VIDEO

STUDENT BACKGROUND

[AED's The Great Migration Arts Integration Lesson](#)

Links to explore:

- [The Great Migration](#)
- [The Great Migration: History, Causes, and Facts](#)
- <https://www.history.com/news/great-migration-southern-landowners>
- [South Unable to Put Stop to Negro Exodus": Newspaper coverage of the Great Migration, 1916 \(primary\)](#)
- ["The Charge": Newspaper editorial on the Great Migration, 1917 \(primary\)](#)

Great Migration Maps

1.[Map 1](#)

2.[Map 2](#)

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ARTS INTEGRATION MATERIALS



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TEACH

Build Background: What was the Harlem Renaissance?

- **Explain the objective:** In this lesson, students will explore the Harlem Renaissance through visual art and music. They will learn about the Blues genre of music, which grew in popularity during the Harlem Renaissance, and will be able to share what they've learned about the time period through creating their own "12 Bar Blues" song.
- **Start with the art (Visual Analysis) – "See, Think, Wonder":** Use the included slides (1-7) to show students several images created by Harlem Renaissance artists. Use all or select several that are most resonant to you/your students.
- For each image, use the "See, Think, Wonder" routine (as a class discussion, in pairs, or independently as a stop-and-jot) to help students think deeply about the images.
- **Close read & research:** Provide students with the introductory informational text, The Harlem Renaissance. Students can use their close reading skills to annotate the text and conduct further research on questions/topics that arise.
 - Additional research links:
 - The New Negro and the Dawn of the Harlem Renaissance
 - 5 Harlem Renaissance Artists Whose Work Helped Reclaim Black Identity
 - Great Migration
 - The Great Migration: History, Causes, and Facts
 - Additional links on the Great Migration can be found in the student background section of this lesson plan.



Learn: Music of the Harlem Renaissance

WATCH: Blues Background and Close Listening Questions



- **Understand the impact of music (Close Listening):** Introduce students to some of the core musical characteristics, developments, and artists of the Harlem Renaissance.
 - Begin with the close reading/annotation handout, Music of the Harlem Renaissance
 - Share slides 8 – 12 with students that contain music samples, the Hear, Think, Wonder routine, and deeper analysis questions to immerse students in the Blues music of the time period.

Apply: Write Your Own 12-Bar Blues Song

- **Explain the assessment:** Explain to students that they will be writing their own short Blues song with lyrics illustrating what the time period was like from the perspective of a person living during the Harlem Renaissance.

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TEACH

Apply: Write Your Own 12-Bar Blues Song (Continued)

- **Step 1 – Counting Bars:** Before students can begin, they will need to understand how Blues music is arranged.
 - **Watch:** Share [Dan & Claudia's How to Count the 12 Bar Blues tutorial video](#) with students so they can learn more about Blues music and how to count the 12 bars of a Blues song.
 - **Count:** Use this included [Learn How to Count the 12-Bar Blues Graphic Organizer](#) to follow along with the video and visually count the bars.
 - **Additional listening:** For more context and examples, see slides 13 & 14.
- **Step 2 – Writing Lyrics:** Next, students will need to write their lyrics.
 - **Watch:** Share [Dan & Claudia's Writing Blues Lyrics tutorial](#) with students.
 - **Watch:** Share [Dan & Claudia's example 12-Bar Blues song, Sidewalks](#) with students.
 - Provide students with the lyrics handout so they can follow along (part of the [Write Your Own Blues Song! Lyrics Brainstorm & "Sidewalks" Example](#) handout).
 - **Annotate example:** Ask students to underline the information they hear in the ["Sidewalks" lyrics](#) about Harlem during the period of the Harlem Renaissance. Ask students to infer the point of view from which the lyrics are written.
 - **Brainstorm:** Students use the [Write Your Own Blues Song! Lyrics Brainstorm Graphic Organizer](#) to think through and note the point of view they want to write their lyrics from, as well as what information about the Harlem Renaissance they'd like to include. Students should refer to their close reading informational texts and additional research.
 - **Music selection:** Backing track options have been provided for students to select from. Links are included on the handout as well as on slide 15. Students will need to select a backing track to craft their lyrics to.
 - Note: *The backing tracks aren't original recordings from the 1920s, but are blues progressions and jam tracks in the correct form that support student composition.*
 - **Write:** Students write their lyrics [on the final page of the handout](#) using the information gathered, the point of view they selected, and the backing track they chose.



Perform & Celebrate: Create a Classroom Salon

- Use slides 16 & 17 to present the concept of a Harlem Renaissance Salon with students:
 - *Harlem Renaissance salons were crucial 1920s–1930s intellectual and social gatherings where Black artists, writers, and thinkers met to foster culture and exchange ideas.*

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TEACH

Perform & Celebrate: Create a Classroom Salon (Continued)



LEARN MORE: [Share Songs in a Classroom "Salon"](#)

- Explain that we will set up our own classroom salon to share our Blues songs.
- Arrange chairs in a circle so all students can see and hear one another.
- Ask students to be ready to:
 - Choose which backing track they will use.
 - Explain whose perspective their song represents.
 - Describe how their song connects to the Harlem Renaissance.
- Invite students to share one at a time.
- As each student introduces their piece, write the song title where everyone can see it (board or chart paper).
- After each performance, allow time for:
 - Positive comments
 - Thoughtful questions
- Reinforce that feedback should be constructive and uplifting.
 - Redirect if needed by reminding students that this is a supportive salon space.
- At the end, review the list of song titles.
- Discuss how the songs reflect:
 - Different perspectives
 - Themes of the Harlem Renaissance
 - Student voice and identity

Extension Activity (Optional)

- Ask students to write a 12-bar blues telling their own personal story.
- Students may write as many verses as they like.