



How to Get the Most Out of

“Harlem Renaissance A–Z”

We are proud to present *READ*'s special digital presentation, “Harlem Renaissance A–Z.” It is a great teaching tool for Black History Month, but it can and should be used any time.

Overview:

“Harlem Renaissance A–Z” is organized alphabetically, covering 24 topics from the Apollo Theater to Zora Neale Hurston. The topics include profiles of great literary and arts figures, historical movements and moments, arts, music, and more.

How to present:

Whiteboard ready as well as perfect for home viewing.

This interactive tool can be presented on your classroom whiteboard. Be sure to use the magnifying tool as needed to blow up text for readability to the back of the room. Also make sure your sound is turned on. You can read the text aloud, or have a different student read aloud for each letter.

Additionally, you can assign the site for individual student reading either in school or at home. You can enable your students to access this site from home by setting up the “magic word” function when you log in to the subscriber-only content area on weeklyreader.com. If you need help with this tool, call customer service at 1-800-786-5500.

How to navigate:

This product has been designed like a virtual magazine for easy, intuitive navigation. Directions for use are right where you need them.

- Read the introduction. If you wish, you can click on the pop-up in the lower right hand corner to see all of the topics. Then flip the page to continue.
- Click on each letter block to open up a pop-up balloon. There is just enough text to introduce each topic, along with a photograph or piece of artwork.

- Close each pop-up and letter block before proceeding on to the next letter block.
- There is no need to go in alphabetical order, but it helps to make sure you don't miss anything.

Links and Extras:

- Some pop-ups contain links to outside websites that present interesting extension materials. We have linked only to appropriate sites, hosted by trustworthy organizations.
- Other topics have links to videos in the letter blocks. The videos are *not* embedded in Youtube pages, so there is no worry about inappropriate material. Be sure to turn up your sound as loud as possible or necessary. (And don't miss our own video of an award-winning recitation of a Langston Hughes poem on letter Q.)
- Some extras are downloadable materials, including a Lit Scene Investigation PDF of another Langston Hughes poem on letter H.

Going Beyond:

This presentation functions as an exciting and motivational jumping-off point for further study. Here are some possible ideas.

- **Choose a letter.** Have students choose a letter at random and then present that section to the class. Then they can follow up with additional research for presentation and/or a written report.
- **Choose a genre.** Invite students to choose one of the following topics: art, music, poetry and literature, sports, civil rights, history, food. Assign each student one of the selections that fits in their chosen category and have them find out more about that topic. For example, if a student chooses art, he or she would begin with further research about William H. Johnson. Another student who chooses art might look for other examples of black artists.

Here is a breakdown of how our topics fit those categories, and some suggestions for further study:

Art:

Letter W—William H. Johnson

R—Renaissance

(Other possibilities: painters Aaron Douglas, Jacob Lawrence, Charles Alston, Palmer Hayden, sculptor Augusta Savage, photographer James Van Der Zee, and more)

Music:

A—Apollo Theater

B—Billie Holiday

E—Duke Ellington

J—Jazz

S—Swing

V—Vibes

(Other possibilities: Count Basie, Fats Waller, Ella Fitzgerald, Eubie Blake, Dizzy Gillespie, Cab Calloway, Marian Anderson, and many other musicians. Also, Black Swan Records, “Porgy and Bess,” and Big Bands.)

Poetry and Literature:

H and Q—Langston Hughes

I—Identity

K—Kids

T—Harlem Suitcase Theater

Y—Young Adult Literature (Walter Dean Myers)

Z—Zora Neal Hurston

(Other possibilities: Poets Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson—his poem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is sometimes called the Negro National Anthem, Jean Toomer, Claude McKay, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and others. Also, actor Paul Robeson, and poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar, who predated the Harlem Renaissance.)

Editors’ advisory: *Please be aware that these writers wrote for adult audiences and some of their works might be considered too adult for some children, either thematically or in terms of language.*

Sports:

G—Harlem Globetrotters

(Sports is not generally considered part of the Harlem Renaissance experience, but we wanted to include some mention here for students who might be motivated by the topic. Other possibilities for research include the Negro Leagues (baseball), the history of African Americans in professional football, and Jesse Owens.)

Civil rights:

C—Cotton Club (discrimination at)

I—Identity

N—the New Negro

X—Excluded

(Other possibilities: Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois, Walter Francis White, Roy Wilkins, Jim Crow laws)

History:

D—Great Depression

M—Great Migration

P—Prohibition

U—Urban

(Another possibility: The New Deal and the WPA [Works Progress/Project Administration])

Food:

F—Food

(Another possibility: the roots of “soul food”)

Miscellaneous:

White support—In addition to white nightclub owners, whose main interest was business, but who nonetheless helped promote the careers of many black performers, there were also white people who took a deep interest in supporting black artists and writers. These include critic and photographer Carl Van Vechten, and philanthropist Charlotte Osgood Mason.

Fashion—the Roaring Twenties, flappers, hairstyles

Why teach the Harlem Renaissance?

Much of what today’s students know about American culture can be traced back to the Harlem Renaissance. It was an exciting period of transition in the national intellectual and cultural conversation, but many students don’t know much about it. It was the Roaring Twenties, followed by the Great Depression, that roller coaster time between the two world wars. Fashions changed, social mores changed, music and art changed, population demographics changed, fortunes changed, politics changed, and people everywhere questioned old assumptions.

Central to that time of transition was the explosion of self-expression and intellectualism in the black community. The roots of the civil rights movement can be traced to this time of radical thinking. At that time, the idea of full social equality for African Americans was indeed considered radical. As extraordinary music, art, poetry, and literature surged in Harlem (and beyond), the contributions of the black citizen to the ongoing creation of the United States commanded recognition, appreciation, and admiration.

Here you will find names that all Americans should know: Langston Hughes, Louis Armstrong, W.E.B. DuBois, Billie Holiday, and more. *READ’s* special digital presentation “Harlem Renaissance A–Z” is a great teaching tool for Black History Month, but it can and should be used any time.