

From Harlem to the Barrio:

Understanding the Harlem Renaissance through Literature, Art and Research

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More information, PowerPoint presentations, bibliography and handouts (organized by lesson number) are available at

http://www.fcps.edu/MtVernonHS/media_center/webquest/2008_2009/harlem_renaissance/

Unit Overview

Introduction: This unit evolved from a research paper based on icons of the Harlem Renaissance to a unit that invites students to explore their own pasts and the pasts of their classmates through poetry, prose, artwork, and research. While the unit was geared towards the mostly African-American and Hispanic students in our English 11 classes, it can be easily adapted for any level and any group of students; many of the motifs and themes in the artwork or literature we use are timeless and apply to many cultures and ethnic groups. The following is an overview of the lessons we created with the following outcomes in mind:

1. Students demonstrate understanding of standard research practices
2. Students demonstrate ability to recognize themes in literature
3. Students demonstrate ability to analyze literature and art
4. Students demonstrate an ability to communicate in formal writing, poetry, and multi-media presentations

Lessons

1. Introduction to the Motifs and Themes of African-American and Hispanic Literature and Art.

Materials: Introductory PowerPoint, champagne bottle handout, bottle of sparkling water, folders of artwork organized by motif/theme, artwork handout

Students learn about the causes of the Harlem Renaissance through the PowerPoint, and take notes on their handouts. In small groups, students then discover the common motifs/themes in their folder of art and present their findings to the class. Use this student-generated list for the art response, literature response, and poetry lessons. The teacher then helps students make connections between the themes/motifs mentioned and Hispanic art, or art of other cultures and ethnic groups. Option: provide the students with the list of themes and then let them decide which ones their artwork represents.

2. Literature Response

Materials: Excerpt from *Black Boy* by Richard Wright (we used a few pages from chapter 1) or other similarly themed piece of literature, literature analysis handouts.

Using the excerpt, students were asked to answer the question, "Is Richard's mother a good mother?" They fill out a chart with their supporting examples from the text, and then write an essay based on this chart. Students practice picking out details in this text to help prepare them to analyze non-print texts. Option: Allow students to come up with their own analysis topic. Option: Socratic seminar.

3. Art Response

Materials: Artwork, art analysis handouts

Students each select one piece of artwork that they will analyze. First, the students discover the themes or motifs presented in their artwork, discover the details of the work, place them in context and then present, through written essays, whether the artist is effective in communicating a particular theme or motif. Option: Students write poems that “match” their pieces of art.

4. Analyzing Poetry

Materials: Poem PowerPoint, poems and chart handouts.

Students practice looking critically at poetry, connecting the poems to the themes and motifs. After the teacher models the process of reading and analyzing a poem, students do the same for their poem of choice. Option: Group work or individual work. Option: Students create a visual that represents his poem. Option: Students choose pieces of art that connect to the poems and explain the reason for these matches.

5. Writing Poetry

Materials: Recent artwork or photography that depicts the same themes or motifs. Students can find their own artwork or photography using the research databases and Smithsonian websites or the teacher can provide art and photography.

Students choose one piece of art and write a poem that connects to the piece of art. Students present their poem and piece of art. Option: Students analyze other students’ poems. Option: Class literary magazine.

6. Introduction to Research Project

Materials: Research databases, Web quest, interview handouts

Students read the directions on the Web quest, and choose one person from each “house” to “interview.” Once the “interviews” are complete, students each select one icon that they would like to research. Option: Students write a research proposal explaining why they picked their icons.

7. Research Project

Materials: Research databases, research guide, Noodletools, handouts on indirect and direct quotations, citation guide, project rubric, student samples, rubric, booklet example, sample works cited sheet

Students spend several classes researching their icon, and preparing their desktop and booklet. Option: do not provide the research guide.

8. Presentation and Evaluation of Projects

Materials: Jazz or other music, snacks, peer evaluation sheet, camera

Students are invited to the “exhibit opening,” at which their desktops are displayed. They evaluate their peers’ projects according to the rubric. Option: Students reflect on where they should fall on the rubric.