

Name: _____ Hour: _____

Crash Course Literature #215: Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance (c. 1920-1930)

General Definition: _____

What / where was “Harlem”? (you’ll have to look this up outside the video) _____

What is a “renaissance”? (small ‘r’ - you’ll have to look this up outside the video) _____

List at least FIVE forms of art or cultural expression which were impacted by the Harlem Renaissance:

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____
(4) _____ (5) _____

The “Double Consciousness” of the African American Experience

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others... One feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts... two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.” (W.E.B. Du Bois)

Many poems, essays, novels, and other art from the Harlem Renaissance involved the “double consciousness” of Black Americans. In plain, simple English, what is this “double consciousness”? (The video talks about it a little, but read the Du Bois quote above as well. If that doesn’t work, Google it.)

Langston Hughes (Thought Bubble)

- Hughes started writing poetry in high school because _____
- He dropped out of college and went to work _____
- He discovered that he wrote best when he was _____
- Hughes wrote about heavy themes in _____ language.
- He was biracial and (probably) gay at a time when it was often unpopular or dangerous to be either.

Langston Hughes Approach to Poetry

- Hughes combined _____ with the _____ (the spoken language of Black Americans - their “vernacular”) to better capture what he wanted to say.
- He criticized other Black writers for working too hard to sound “white” and follow “white” ways of creating art. He wrote, “This is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America-- this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial _____ into the mold of American _____, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible.” {NOTE: See ‘Double Consciousness’ above.}
- On the flip side, some Black writers accused Hughes of being _____. They thought he was too focused on _____.

“The Negro Speaks of Rivers” *{You should listen to / carefully read the actual poem!}*

- ★ This poem is in what your English teacher would call “lyric mode” - it’s poetry trying to capture an _____.
- ★ In very few words, Hughes uses his talk about rivers to connect himself with _____ (trading the immediate for the _____).
- ★ All of the “I” statements provide “agency” - people making choices and having *some* input over how they do their jobs and how they live their lives. {Teachers use this term all the time.}
- ★ His use of words like “muddy” and “dusky” combined with “golden” and “ancient” help darkness and brownness to be seen as lustrous (shining) and _____ and revered (respected).

“Harlem” *{You should listen to / carefully read the actual poem!}*

- ★ Define “deferred” (you may have to look it up): _____
- ★ At its most basic, this poem is suggesting that if circumstances in the U.S. (especially the racial dynamics of the times) don’t change, _____.

{NOTE: Why are we doing this in a history class? Because the arts ARE history. When we understand the songs, poems, and paintings of a time and place, we’re much closer to understanding everything else about that time and place. When they involve the experiences of particular groups of people, they give us a window into their thoughts, feelings, hopes, etc.}

