



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

*to strengthen teaching in public schools®*

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2021 Volume I: U. S. Social Movements through Biography

---

## **Artist in Action: Examining the Activism of James Weldon Johnson and Augusta Savage**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 21.01.06, published September 2021  
by Karen W. Mullins

This unit is designed to provide 7<sup>th</sup> grade English students with an overview of the social, political, racial, economic, and cultural aspects of the Harlem Renaissance. Through a study of the Harlem Renaissance's precipitating factors and competing political ideas, students will get a broad overview of the complexity of the movement outside of artistic creations. By reading excerpts of James Weldon Johnson's autobiography, *Along This Way*, students will explore Johnson's leadership in the anti-lynching movement and the fight for African-American enfranchisement alongside his prolific literary accomplishments. Similarly, a close reading of Augusta Savage's biography, *Augusta Savage: Renaissance Woman* will help students understand how her protests against both racial and gender discrimination in the arts paved the way for many modern artists who use their platforms for social commentary. Students will then use their readings as the basis for a fishbowl discussion comparing and contrasting Johnson and Savage. The unit will conclude with students creating a children's book illustrating the connection between the artists' lived experiences, their art, their activism, other artists of the Harlem Renaissance, and social movements of their time as precursors to modern movements. *In Her Hands: The Story of Sculptor Augusta Savage* will be the model text for the children's book.

(Developed for ELA, grade 7; recommended for History, Social Studies, African American History, and African American Literature, grades 6-8)

---

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit [https://teachers.yale.edu/terms\\_of\\_use](https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use)