



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

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Introduction

The 3rd module in our 7th grade English curriculum explores the Harlem Renaissance. Many of my students come to the unit with no prior knowledge of this prolific artistic, cultural, and social movement, which is woven into the very fabric of American history and literature. With increased introduction to the lives of the artists of the Harlem Renaissance, students would better understand the movement's significance. Additionally, they could see how art has been used as a form of activism. James Weldon Johnson and August Savage, key contributors to the Harlem Renaissance, railed against the status quo and actively participated in social movements calling for equal economic opportunity, political empowerment, and self-determination for African-Americans.

For this unit, students will read excerpts from Johnson's autobiography, *Along This Way*, and the biography, *Augusta Savage: Renaissance Woman*, about the life and work of the sculptress. Through his autobiography, students will explore Johnson's leadership in the anti-lynching movement and the fight for African-American enfranchisement. Similarly, a close reading of Savage's biography 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. Other books and scholarly articles will supplement the anchor texts to support students' lateral thinking skills.

Rationale

At my school, 97% of the population is African-American and 98% of our scholars live in low-income households (based on the percentage of students who receive free or reduced lunch).¹ The Harlem Renaissance and the biographies of these two key contributors could be not only a source of pride, but also inspiration for our students. Marian Wright Edelman once said, "Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it." Many of my students are from communities that others would say "need improvement" as they attend a Title I and reside in one of the seven

income based public housing areas that our school services. Despite their circumstances, these middle schoolers are eager to learn and work hard. These young learners are the epitome of possibility and hope, embodying resilience in the face of adversity and, like the artists of the Harlem Renaissance, possess vast potential for greatness.

Objectives

The student will:

- prepare for a text-based discussion comparing and contrasting James Weldon Johnson and Augusta Savage. (7.1)
- follow discussion norms to have an effective text-based discussion. (7.1)
- present claims in a clear way, supported by evidence. (7.1)
- use evidence from multiple texts to make connections between James Weldon Johnson and Augusta Savage as well as *Lift Every Voice and Sing* and *The Harp*. (7.5)
- quote accurately from the texts to support ideas during a text-based discussion. (7.5)
- compare how two authors emphasize different evidence when presenting biographical and autobiographical information. (7.6)
- determine central ideas and how they are developed in *Along this Way* and *Augusta Savage: Renaissance Woman*. (7.6)
- analyze how authors treat the same topic differently by looking at how they present evidence and interpret facts. (7.6)
- determine two or more central ideas and analyze their development over the course of the anchor texts. (7.6)
- write an objective summary analyzing the development of central ideas over the course of the anchor texts. (7.6)
- write a narrative telling the story of Johnson / Savage for elementary school students. (7.7)

Content Background

The Harlem Renaissance or New Negro Movement

The term, “Harlem Renaissance” often brings to mind images of the Jazz age - clubs, blues, jazz, literature, music, and art - with an African-American hue. While these may be appropriate signifiers, the Harlem Renaissance, was much more. It was not just an artistic resurgence, but also a cultural, social, and political movement all in one. As Langston Hughes, one of the era’s most well know and prolific writers refers to it as “the period when the Negro was in vogue”.²

Like other social movements, the Harlem Renaissance often defies definition. There is much debate over if the movement existed, what the dates were, and what the movement should be called. While modern scholars use the term “Harlem Renaissance”, some writers and intellectuals at the time referred to the movement as

the “Negro renaissance”, while others preferred the term “New Negro Movement” thus widening its location, scope, and political implications.³

Similarly, scholars debate the time period for what we will refer to as the Harlem Renaissance. Because “periodization is always artificial and approximate”, this is not surprising.⁴ From a strictly literary aspect, scholars mark the time period between 1916, with the production of Alice Grimke’s play *Rachel* and ending with the publication of Zora Neal Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 1937, while the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* presents a timeline of 1919-1940.⁵ From a wider social perspective, some mark the beginning in 1919 with the 369th “Harlem Hellfighters” Regiment’s march up Fifth Avenue which is the same year Claude McKay’s anti-lynching sonnet, “If We Must Die” was first published. A *Companion to the Harlem Renaissance* provides an even broader timeframe that began in the early twentieth century and faded prior to the Second World War.⁶ Looked at together, these discussions roughly agree that the Harlem Renaissance preceded Jazz Age Harlem and lasted well into the 1930’s with the decade of the 1920’s as its pinnacle. For our discussion, we will use Hutchinson’s dates of 1918-1937, while recognizing that “the Harlem Renaissance, or New Negro Movement, was characterized by remarkable diversity that cannot be limited to a linear narrative of boom and bust... (with an) unprecedented flowering of black cultural production in visual art, literature, dance, and music.”⁷

Precipitating Factors

Now that we have established a name (The Harlem Renaissance) and time period (1918-1937), let us look first at the precipitating factors and then at the characteristics of the movement as we continue to define the undefinable. The Harlem Renaissance can be viewed as either a segment or an evolution of the larger “New Negro Movement” in African-American discourse. This New Negro can be traced to an 1895 editorial in the *Cleveland Gazette* which speaks to “a class of colored people who have arisen since the war with education, refinement, money, assertiveness, and racial consciousness”.⁸ Booker T. Washington and others sought to create a public image of the New Negro specifically through the anthology, *A New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate and Up-to-Date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race* which was a compilation of excerpted black histories, slave narratives, journalism, biographical sketches, and exaltations of black soldiers that provided testimony to Black progress and perfectibility. The New Negro of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century sought to forget the past of slavery and created him / herself through description and the creation of literature as necessary in the search for respectability. Immediately after World War I, a new iteration of the New Negro appeared with more militant political connotations as seen in essays in publications such as the *Messenger*, the *Crusader*, the *Kansas City Call*, and the *Chicago Whip* in response to the post war race riots. In 1925, Alain Locke edited a special edition of the magazine *Survey Graphic*, which was devoted exclusively to life in Harlem, which he later expanded into the anthology *The New Negro*. In these works, Locke sought to define the New Negro as a poet using the sublimity of the arts to speak to America and define who and what the Negro was or could be.

This New Negro arrived in Harlem and other large northern and Midwest cities as part of the Great Migration. Beginning around 1916, the Great Migration saw about six million Black Southerners relocate to urban centers. Limited economic opportunities in the South and ongoing racial oppression and violence through Jim Crow laws and lynching were some of the motivating “push” factors for the move. Simultaneous “pull” factors included reports of good wages and living conditions spread by word of mouth and through African-American publications, like the *Chicago Defender*, with ads for employment and housing as well as personal testimonies of success in the North. Though these urban centers such as Detroit, Chicago, and New York, were not utopias

due to segregation and race riots, they represented better civil, social, and economic opportunities for many.⁹ In addition to Southern migration, there was an influx of immigrants from the African diaspora, specifically the Caribbean, as Blacks across the globe sought better lives. This physical convergence of Black people helped facilitate Pan-African sensibilities that were evident in art of the time. Harlem served as a symbolic capital for the movement as it was a facilitator for artistic expression and had a popular nightlife. As a major communication capital of the world, New York provided aspiring African-American artists prominence and more opportunities for publication. By the early 1920's, Harlem, formerly a white residential area, had become virtually a Black city within Manhattan. While people who identified with the renaissance lived in other boroughs, they often met in Harlem or attended special events at the 135th Street branch of the NYC Public Library. Likewise, Black intellectuals from other metropolitan areas such as Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, who had their own artistic circles, also met in Harlem, with some settling there. Because of the diverse and decentered nature of New York City Black social life, this was a particularly productive place for artistic and cultural experimentation.

Alongside the artistic and cultural growth were increased political and social awareness and engagement, thus making the Harlem Renaissance unusual among artistic and literary movements due to its close relationship to civil rights and reform organizations. *The Crisis*, published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); *Opportunity*, published by the National Urban League; *The Messenger*, a socialist journal eventually connected with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; and *Negro World*, the newspaper of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, were crucial to the movement's growth.¹⁰

This merging of Black people from diverse cultural and geographic backgrounds also brought myriad political and social ideologies. Though all sought better civic and economic opportunities for African-Americans, the beliefs about how to achieve those goals varied greatly and resulted in different schools of thought and debates by prominent leaders of the time. These leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Alain Locke, and Marcus Garvey drew supporters from Harlem's artistic community and impacted their creative and civic work.

Competing Political Ideas

In order to better understand the deliberate artistic decisions and the continued fascination with the Harlem Renaissance and its relations to debates about representation, vernacular theories of Black literature, Black radicalism, Black nationalism, transnationalism, and feminism, it is important to look briefly at the prevailing political / social ideas at the time.¹¹

Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois

The debate between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois in the late 19th century and early 20th century framed the quest for African-American equality and paved the way for the modern Civil Rights movement. Though contemporaries committed to the civil rights cause and skilled scholars, their differences in backgrounds and methods were both galvanizing and polarizing for Black America.

Washington's early life and education greatly influenced his later thinking. Born a slave in Virginia in 1856, after the Civil War, Washington worked in a salt mine and as a domestic before attending Hampton Institute which was one of many schools founded by the American Missionary Association (AMA) after the Civil War to educate newly freed Black people. After graduation, Washington taught before heading the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama which was a vocational school founded to provide African-Americans moral

instruction and practical work skills so they could be successful in their new lives of freedom. Because of this background, Washington was a proponent of economic independence and the ability to prove themselves productive members of society that would lead African-Americans to real equality. Washington's philosophy of self-help, solidarity, and accommodation formed the crux of his Atlanta Exposition speech in 1895. While the ideas espoused in the speech were eagerly accepted by Black people for their practicality and white people who were willing to defer difficult discussions on African-American equality, critics referred to it disparagingly as the "Atlanta Compromise". Du Bois was among those critics.

Du Bois was born 12 years after Washington in 1868 to a free Black family in a somewhat integrated community in Massachusetts. He excelled in school, graduating as valedictorian of his high school class. While attending Fisk University in Tennessee, another school founded by the AMA, Du Bois for the first time encountered the open racism and oppression of the South. No doubt this experience impacted his social and political thinking. He returned to the North to continue his education and became the first African-American man to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University. Equal rights for blacks were on his mind as evidenced through his dissertation on the African Slave Trade and the groundbreaking essay, "The Strivings of Negro People", in the *Atlantic Monthly*, which explained how it felt to be the victim of racism.

Partially derived from the *Atlantic* article, *The Souls of Black Folk*, a collection of essays examining the Black experience in America by Du Bois, gave voice to his personal history through his arguments. Not only did the book introduce the idea of "double consciousness", the internal conflict or inward "twoness" experienced by African-Americans because of their racialized oppression in a white-dominated society, but it also explicitly differentiated Du Bois from the conservative voice of Washington.¹² Du Bois argued that Washington's approach would only serve to prolong white oppression, while political action, agitation and protest were necessary to change the status quo. Du Bois and other Black intellectuals believed that setting a civil rights agenda would hasten the march to inequality and founded the Niagara Group for this purpose. Though this group dissolved, many of its ideals and members, including Du Bois, were incorporated in the NAACP. Du Bois served as editor of the NAACP journal, *Crisis*, for the next 25 years affording a space for artists and activists of the Harlem Renaissance to share their voices while offering social and political commentary. This ideological rift, which divided African-American leaders into two camps - the conservative supporters of Washington and the radical critics led by Du Bois - would eventually prove to be one of the most important in the history of the struggle for civil rights.¹³

Alain Locke

Alain LeRoy Locke was a preeminent scholar, educator, theorist, critic, and interpreter of African-American literature and art who referred to himself as "midwife" to aspiring young African-American writers in the 1920's. Locke is sometimes referred to as the "Father of the Harlem Renaissance" because of his 1925 publication, *The New Negro*, an anthology of poetry, essays, plays, music, and portraiture. Locke sought to redefine the New Negro through this text with the purpose of documenting "the New Negro culturally and socially - to register the transformations of the inner and outer life of the Negro in America that have so significantly taken place in the last few years."¹⁴ He was also an imaginative and methodical philosopher who developed theories of value, pluralism and cultural relativism that instructed and were strengthened by his work on aesthetics. Locke's ideas of Black aesthetics were quite different from other Black intellectuals of his day, most notably W. E. B. Du Bois. Locke and Du Bois disagreed about the appropriate social and political function of Black artistic endeavors. While Du Bois thought it was the role and responsibility of Black artists to create "art that works on behalf of racial advancement, deploying 'Truth' to promote 'universal understanding' and 'Goodness' to engender 'sympathy and human interest'" thus aiding the goal of social uplift.¹⁵ Locke

criticized this as “propaganda” and argued that the primary responsibility and function of the artist is not to produce “decadent or “over-civilized” art but art free to serve its own ends, free to choose either “group expression” or “individualistic expression” thereby communicating something of universal human appeal.¹⁶ Though they disagreed, both Locke and Du Bois sought to combat the myth of Black inferiority.

Marcus Garvey

Like both Washington and Locke, Marcus Garvey was often in disagreement with Du Bois. Garvey was a Jamaican born political activist, entrepreneur, journalist, and publisher. He was the founder and first president of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA). Ideologically, Garvey was a Black nationalist and Pan-Africanist with his particular brand known as Garveyism. Garveyism, as an outshoot of Black nationalism, through economic, racial, and political policies focused on the unification and empowerment of Blacks under the banner of their collective African descent.¹⁷ Garvey must be included in a discussion of the Harlem Renaissance as he was also a significant Black leader in creative, intellectual, and political pursuits in the U.S. as well as on a global scale. The middle-class leadership of the NAACP (James Weldon Johnson and W. E. B. Du Bois), Urban League, and the *Messenger* (Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph) were often at odds with Garvey’s message of Black nationalism and a free Black Africa. In 1924, Du Bois claimed that “Marcus Garvey is the most dangerous enemy of the Negro race in America and in the world.”¹⁸ Despite their differences all of these leaders subscribed to some form of Pan-Africanism and through art, literature, economic empowerment, and political power sought equality for African-Americans.

These charismatic leaders affected the artists of the Harlem Renaissance in a number of ways from incorporating traditional African elements in their visual works of art, to using the written word to speak out against lynching and segregation and affirm positive images of Black America. James Weldon Johnson was not only actively engaged in these political debates as a leader of the NAACP with Du Bois, but also was a prolific man of letters who used his creative writing to speak eloquently to the African-American experience. Similarly, Augusta Savage was socially connected to Marcus Garvey and used both her platform and artistic ability to speak out against racial discrimination and sculpt positive images of African-Americans including Du Bois, Johnson, and Garvey.

James Weldon Johnson

James Weldon Johnson was the epitome of a renaissance man as he excelled in many different fields. As a songwriter, poet, novelist, journalist, critic, autobiographer, educator, public speaker, lawyer, and social activist he accomplished a great deal personally and professionally.

Johnson was born in 1871 in Jacksonville, Florida to a freeborn Virginian father and a Bahamian mother. He was trained in music, literature, and other subjects by his mother, a schoolteacher. Her influence developed interests that Johnson would take with him throughout his complex career. His parents raised him without the sense of limitations placed on African-Americans, especially in South during that time. After graduating from Atlanta University in 1894, Johnson returned to Jacksonville to teach at Stanton grammar school for Black students. When he became principal, Johnson expanded Stanton to include high school. While working as an educator, Johnson studied the law and in 1897 became the first African-American man admitted to the Florida bar and began practicing law. While balancing his law studies and responsibilities as an educator, Johnson founded *The Daily American* newspaper 1895. Already established as a man of law and letters, Johnson partnered with his brother, John Rosamond Johnson - a composer, to write the song, “Lift Every Voice and Sing”, based on James’s 1900 poem of the same name. This song is widely known as the Black National

Anthem and inspired other works of the Harlem Renaissance including Augusta Savage's sculpture for the 1939 World's Fair.¹⁹

In 1901, the Johnson brothers moved to New York City. There, they created approximately 200 songs for Broadway shows. While in New York, Johnson studied at Columbia University and began connecting with other influential African-American community members and leaders. In 1904, Johnson became the chairman of the newly created Colored Republican Club of New York and it became a huge success. Many Harlem Renaissance artists joined and according to *The New York Sun*, "the Colored Republican Club...has almost a corner on the writers of ragtime.... Among its 800 members are at least 200 trained singers and fifty men capable of caressing the piano. 'I suppose no other organization not purely musical has so many musicians and composers as ours'".²⁰ That same year, the Johnson brothers wrote "Teddy's Song" for Theodore Roosevelt's presidential campaign. They sent the song to Booker T. Washington who then sent it to Roosevelt who wrote back that he considered a "bully good song." Realizing the song was a hit, the Johnsons renamed the song, "You're All Right Teddy" and published it along with sheet music and it became the official song of the campaign. This merging of political involvement / activism and art would lead to the next stage of James Weldon Johnson's career.

As a show of gratitude for his campaign contribution, and as part of his effort to promote African-Americans in government, Roosevelt appointed James Weldon Johnson United States Consul to Puerto Cabello, Venezuela. Johnson served there with such distinction that Taft later appointed him Consul to Nicaragua, a position he held until 1913. During this time, Johnson anonymously published his only novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. This fictional autobiography explored the complexity of racial identity through the life of its biracial narrator. Raised in a life of security and culture secured by monthly checks from his white father, when he accidentally learns that he is Black, the narrator experienced the first of many identity shifts that occurred throughout his life eventually leading him to "pass" by living his life as a member of white society. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* attracted little attention until Johnson reissued it under his own name in 1927. The public assumed it was a work of nonfiction, so to clarify his upbringing and life, Johnson published his actual autobiography, *Along This Way*, in 1933.²¹

After leaving the world of diplomacy, Johnson turned his attention from the international to the national when he joined the NAACP and in 1916 became a field secretary where helped expand membership and open new branches across the South. During this time, he campaigned for a federal anti-lynching bill and spoke at the 1919 National Conference on Lynching. In 1920, he became the first African-American to serve as the Executive Secretary of the NAACP, a position he held for a decade. In this top leadership position, Johnson continued to fight against lynching, segregation, and Black voter disenfranchisement in the South. Despite the demands of NAACP leadership, Johnson continued not only to write, but also support other Black artists as he became known as one of the leading figures in the development of the Harlem Renaissance. While actively working with the NAACP, Johnson published *Fifty Years and Other Poems* (1917), *Self-Determining Haiti* (1920), *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), two volumes of *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, in collaboration with his brother (1925, 1926), and *God's Trombones* (1927). During a leave of absence from the NAACP in 1929, with the support of Julius Rosenwald Fellowship, Johnson wrote *Black Manhattan*. In 1930, Johnson resigned from the NAACP and became the Adam K. Spence Professor of Creative Literature at Fisk University.²²

Throughout his wide-ranging career, Johnson developed a unique philosophy on gaining Black equality and combating racism that scholars contrasted with views of other Black intellectuals. While Du Bois championed the power of a liberal arts education and the "Talented Tenth" and Washington argued for industrial training,

Johnson believed Black Americans should create magnificent literature and art to prove their equality to whites in terms of intellect, ability, and creativity. This belief no doubt supported and encouraged Black artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance.

Augusta Savage

More than just a gifted sculptor, Augusta Savage was also an activist, community organizer, teacher, and a leader in breaking down barriers for black artists. Her artwork was acclaimed for its positive images of black people, often seen by some as outsiders. By creating these images, Savage elevated her Black subjects to mainstream American citizens. She was central to the Harlem Renaissance, not just for her activism and talented artwork, but for her ability to connect artists from many generations.

Born Augusta Christine Fells in Green Cove Springs, Florida, on February 29, 1892, she was the seventh of fourteen children of Cornelia and Edward Fells. Savage knew from a very young age that she wanted to become a sculptor, but her father, a Methodist minister, strongly opposed her early interest in art. Fells often scolded and whipped her for creating “graven images”. Savage recalls, “My father licked me four or five times a week... and almost whipped all the art out of me.”²³

In 1907, at only 15 years old, Savage married John T. Moore, and the following year her only child, Irene, was born. Moore died several years after the birth of their daughter, and the widowed artist eventually married James Savage, a carpenter whose name she kept after their divorce. Savage’s father moved his family from Green Cove Springs to West Palm Beach, Florida, in 1915 and she moved with them. Lack of family encouragement and support combined with the scarcity of local clay kept Savage from sculpting for almost four years. In 1919, a local potter provided her with clay which she used to sculpt a group of figures that she entered in the West Palm Beach County Fair. Her work was well received and won a special prize, ribbon of honor, and the support of the fair’s superintendent who encouraged her to study art despite the racism she would face. Heartened by her success, Savage moved to Jacksonville, Florida, where she hoped to support herself by sculpting portrait busts of prominent Blacks in the community. When that patronage did not materialize, Savage left her daughter in the care of her parents and moved to New York City.²⁴

In 1920, with little money and a job as apartment caretaker, Savage enrolled in Cooper Union’s School of Art which did not charge tuition. Her teachers knew immediately that Savage was talented, and eventually provided her with a scholarship to cover her living expenses, and she excelled by finishing the 4 -year program in just 3 years. In 1923, Savage applied and was one of about 100 young women selected to attend a special summer program to study art at Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts in France. Unfortunately, her application was later refused, and her acceptance revoked when the jurors learned she was African-American. This incident served as a call to action for Savage and she sent letters to the local media about the program selection committee's discriminatory practices. Her story made headlines in many newspapers and signified Savage’s acceptance of the role as a “race woman” or “intellectual fundamentally engaged in their work with the sociopolitical experience of people of color.”²⁵ Although Savage’s public defense wasn't enough to change the group's verdict, one committee member, Herman MacNeil, denounced the decision and invited Savage to further hone her craft at his Long Island studio. Also, in 1923, Savage married her third and final husband, Robert L. Poston, a newspaper publisher editor who eventually became Secretary General of Marcus Garvey’s UNIA. As a result, Garvey became a family friend and visited the home of Savage and Poston to discuss the state of African-American political affairs. Eventually, Garvey sat for a bust sculpture by Savage and the two further explored the ideas of Garveyism.

During the early 1920's Savage's talent was recognized with commissions to create busts of other prominent personalities such as W. E. B. Du Bois as she was one of the first artists who consistently dealt with black physiognomy. Her best-known work of the 1920s was *Gamin* (French for "street urchin"), an informal bust portrait of her nephew, for which she was awarded a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship to study in Paris in 1929. There she studied briefly with Felix Benneteau at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. She had two works accepted for the Salon d'Automne and exhibited at the Grand Palais in Paris. In 1931, Savage won a second Rosenwald fellowship, which permitted her to remain in Paris for an additional year. She also received a Carnegie Foundation grant for eight months of travel in France, Belgium, and Germany.²⁶

When Savage returned to Harlem in 1932, the Great Depression made commissions and art sales difficult to obtain, so she established the Savage Studio of Arts and Crafts and became an influential art educator in Harlem. In 1934, she became the first African-American member of the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors. In 1937, Savage's career took a significant turn when she was appointed the first director of the Harlem Community Art Center and was commissioned by the New York World's Fair of 1939 to create a sculpture symbolizing the musical contributions of African-Americans. Inspired by the lyrics of James Weldon Johnson's poem "Lift Every Voice and Sing", Savage decided to symbolize Negro spirituals and hymns in her sculpture of the same name (also called *The Harp*). She took a leave of absence from her position at the Harlem Community Art Center and spent almost two years completing the sixteen-foot sculpture which was cast in plaster and finished to resemble black basalt. The sculpture depicted a group of twelve stylized black singers in graduated heights that symbolized the strings of the harp. The sounding board was formed by the hand and arm of God, and a kneeling man holding music represented the foot pedal. No funds were available to cast *The Harp*, nor were there any facilities to store it. Sadly, after the fair closed Savage's largest work and last major commissioned piece was demolished in spite of the acclaim it received.²⁷

Savage returned to Harlem only to learn that her position at the Harlem Community Art Center was held by someone else. The Harlem Community Art Center closed when federal funds were cut off, but in 1939 Savage tried to reestablish an art center in Harlem with the opening of the Salon of Contemporary Negro Art. She was founder-director of the small gallery that was the first of its kind in Harlem. Unfortunately, that venture closed shortly after its opening due to lack of funding.

Disheartened and depressed by her job loss and two failed attempts at starting art centers, Savage retreated to the small town of Saugerties, New York, in the Catskill Mountains. During her years in Saugerties, Savage explored her interest in writing children's stories, murder mysteries, and vignettes, although none were published. She occasionally visited New York, taught children in local summer camps, and produced a few portrait sculptures of tourists.

In addition to collaborating with and sculpting Black leaders of the day such as Du Bois, Johnson, and Garvey, Savage was also a key member of the Harlem art community and a member of the 306 Group. Named for its location, the group was housed at 306 West 141st Street. Savage collaborated a great deal with members of the group and other artists in sharing techniques and ideas with young Black artists, including Charles Alston, Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, and Morgan and Marvin Smith. Her legacy survives in the artists and future artists whose lives she touched. Savage believed that teaching others was far more important than creating art herself and explained her motivation in an interview: "If I can inspire one of these youngsters to develop the talent, I know they possess, then my monument will be in their work. No one could ask for more than that."²⁸

Teaching Strategies

This curriculum unit is designed for students to develop higher order thinking skills, so many of the activities require students to analyze both fiction and non-fiction texts as well as critically view historical artifacts and pieces of visual art.

Students will learn the necessary background information through a variety of instructional strategies including direct instruction through lecture, discovery learning, close reading, whole-class and fishbowl discussions, and multi-media analyses. The fishbowl discussions will help students practice being both contributors and listeners in a group discussion. It is especially helpful in ensuring that all students participate and pose questions and ideas to each other that they can later explore in more detail in independent writing assignments.

Throughout the unit, students will write in various forms to prepare for class discussions, summarize ideas, create a children's book and a narrative /script for their comparative multi-media presentation. Using inquiry-based practices, students will further develop the critical thinking skills needed for research writing.

Classroom Activities

Lesson 1: Unit Introduction and Gallery Walk

Objective: The student will infer the topic of the unit and build background knowledge by observing and analyzing artifacts and images from the Harlem Renaissance.

Materials:

- Reprinted copy of the March 1925 edition of *Survey Graphic: Harlem Mecca of the New Negro*
- Printed copy of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by James Weldon Johnson
- YouTube videos of "Lift Every Voice and Sing"
- Audio Recording of "Lift Every Voice and Sing"
- Poster of the sculpture *Lift Every Voice and Sing / The Harp* by Augusta Savage
- Pictures of the sculpture busts of James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey by Augusta Savage
- Map of The Great Migration
- Map of New York City
- I Notice / I Wonder Note Catcher
- Guiding Questions Handout:
 - What do you already know about the Harlem Renaissance?
 - What do you want to know about the Harlem Renaissance?
 - What can you infer about the Harlem Renaissance from your gallery walk?
 - What are some of the historical, social, and cultural factors surrounding and contributing to the Harlem Renaissance?
 - What are some of the lasting legacies of the Harlem Renaissance?

- Classroom and / student technology (document camera, audio and video player, laptops / Chromebooks, Smartboard)

This will be the first lesson of the unit and will introduce students to artifacts and images from the Harlem Renaissance through discovery learning, which allows students freedom within a resource-rich space to ‘discover’ answers. It requires students to build upon prior knowledge and use resources available to increase their own knowledge. As students enter the class, they will respond to the first 2 guiding questions as their snapshot / bell ringer / entrance ticket activity. After 5 minutes, the teacher will cold call students to share their answers. The teacher will then distribute the note catchers and explain the directions for completing them during their gallery walk. The images and artifacts will be distributed around the room at 8 different stations. Students will have a copy (paper or electronic) of the I Notice / I Wonder Note Catcher and complete a section for each of the stations. Small groups of 2-3 students will travel through and complete the gallery walk together, spending 5 minutes at each station. As they visit each station, students will fill in a portion of their note catcher and discuss their notes with each other. After each group has cycled through all 8 stations, as a class we will complete an electronic version of the note catcher using Padlet or Nearpod as students share their answers. We will keep the class note catcher to reference throughout the unit and have students answer their “I wonder” questions as they gain more knowledge. As an exit ticket, students will share their favorite station from the gallery walk and explain why.

Lesson 7: Fishbowl Discussion

Objective: The student will actively participate in a fishbowl discussion by asking questions, sharing their opinions, actively listening, and taking notes.

Materials:

- Discussion norms poster for review and display
- Student notes
- Student anchor texts
- Student self-evaluation forms
- Teacher evaluation forms
- Grading rubric
- Timer

In preparation for the fishbowl discussion during this lesson of the unit, students will have critical background knowledge through direct instruction, lecture, and class discussion using district curriculum material and highlights from *A History of the Harlem Renaissance*. Students will have read and discussed their anchor text, which will be a reading packet consisting of excerpts from *Along this Way*, *Augusta Savage: Sculptor of the Harlem Renaissance*, and *Women Artists of the Harlem Renaissance*. In addition to the biographical reading packets, students will have read experts from scholarly articles to provide different perspectives of the artists. Students will then use their readings as the basis for a fishbowl discussion where they will respond to the question: *How did Johnson and Savages life experience influence their activism and art. Explain your answers and provide support from the texts.*

The class should be arranged with half the students sitting in the inner circle (the fishbowl) for the discussion and a half the class seated in the outer circle to observe. Students should be prepared for the discussion with annotated texts and their own discussion questions and ideas. This will be assigned for homework throughout the first part of the unit. The inner circle will have 15 minutes in the fishbowl to respond to the prompt and

each other, while the outer circle takes notes. After 15 minutes, the outer circle will have the opportunity to ask questions to students in the fishbowl before switching places and roles and repeat the process. After the discussion, students should reflect on the discussion and what they learned. They should also evaluate their performance as both listeners and participants. These reflections will be recorded on their self-evaluation forms and in a short debriefing video using Flipgrid or similar application. Students will keep their questions, notes, and debrief video as reference material when they complete their children’s book in a later lesson.

Bibliography

Bey, Sharif. "Augusta Savage: Sacrifice, Social Responsibility, and Early African American Art Education." *Studies in Art Education* 58, no. 2 (2017): 125-40. Bey’s article explores Savage’s role as a teacher and Director at the Harlem Community Art Center. He focuses on her influence and legacy on other prominent Black artists and her political and social responsibility.

Carter, Jacoby Adeshei, "Alain LeRoy Locke", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/alain-locke/>. Carter’s article provides a detailed overview of Locke’s philosophical stance as well as biographical information.

Clarke, John Henrik. "Marcus Garvey: The Harlem Years." *Transition*, no. 46 (1974): 14-19. Accessed July 21, 2021. doi:10.2307/2934951. Clarke provides a brief biographical sketch of Marcus Garvey, his organizations, and beliefs.

Etinde-Crompton, Charlotte, and Samuel Willard Crompton. *Augusta Savage: Sculptor of the Harlem Renaissance*. Enslow Publishing, LLC, 2019. The Cromptons provide a detailed biography of Savage’s life from early childhood until her death. The book also contains numerous images of her and her sculptures.

Farebrother, Rachel, and Miriam Thaggert, eds. *A History of the Harlem Renaissance*. Cambridge University Press, 2021. Farebrother and Thaggert give an in-depth overview of the Harlem Renaissance including the social and political forces involved. It also highlights major artistic contributors.

Gates, Henry Louis. "The New Negro and the Black Image: From Booker T. Washington to Alain Locke." *Freedom’s Story*, TeacherServe©. National Humanities Center. July 2, 2021. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1917beyond/essays/newnegro.htm>. Gates gives a detailed timeline of the history of the term "New Negro". He traces its uses and evolution through different political perspectives and discusses the major debates of the time.

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"Great Migration." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 30, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Migration>. This article gives detailed background information on The Great Migration including its causes and social, political, and economic impact.

Hayes, Jeffreen M., et al. *Augusta Savage, Renaissance Woman*. Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, 2018. Hayes work is considered one of the definitive biographies of Savage and presents her life story along a curated collection of images and analysis of her work.

Honey, Maureen. "The Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro." *A Companion to American Literature* 3 (2020): 157-172. Honey examines the Harlem Renaissance as a distinct African American cultural movement during the early twentieth century, and as a shifting category in American cultural and intellectual history.

Hutchinson, Gary. "Harlem Renaissance." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 17, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Harlem-Renaissance-American-literature-and-art>. This article gives broad overview of The Harlem Renaissance including its precipitating factors and social, political, and economic impact.

"James Weldon Johnson: A Chronology." *The Langston Hughes Review* 8, no. 1/2 (1989): 1-3. Accessed July 1, 2021. This article provides a detailed chronology of Johnson's life work including his political leadership roles and his artistic endeavors.

Johnson, James Weldon. *Along this way: the autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*. Vol. 314. New York: Viking Press, 1933. Johnson's autobiography provides an animated portrayal of his life. It traces his journey from his birth and details his education, role in the Harlem Renaissance, and years as a professor, diplomat, and civil rights reformer.

Kirschke, Amy Helene. *Women Artists of the Harlem Renaissance*. University Press of Mississippi, 2016. Kirschke's book chronicles the challenges of women artists and contextualizes their achievements within the framework of the Harlem Renaissance.

Locke, Alain. "Forward to The New Negro, An Interpretation". The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, 1925. Locke creates provocative and compelling anthology of writers who shaped the Harlem Renaissance movement, while exploring the evolution of the African-American in society.

"Martin Luther King Jr. Middle in Richmond, VA." GreatSchools.org, 2021. <https://www.greatschools.org/virginia/richmond/1452-Martin-Luther-King-Jr.-Middle-School/#Students>. This site gathers data from multiple government sources to give an overview of a school and provide a rating based on several factors.

Savage, Augusta. "Augusta Savage: An autobiography." *The Crisis* 36 (1929): 269. This article written by Savage appeared in the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine and includes anecdotes about her childhood and images of her work.

Sherrard-Johnson, Cherene, ed. *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*. John Wiley & Sons, 2015. Sherrard-Johnson presents a comprehensive collection of original essays that address the literature and culture of the Harlem Renaissance from the end of World War I to the middle of the 1930s.

"The Times and Life of W.E.B. Du Bois at Penn." Penn Today, January 22, 2019. <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/times-and-life-web-du-bois-penn>. This article produced by Penn State gives a detailed biographical sketch of Du Bois and political involvement.

"Writing in Protest." Toolbox Library: Primary Resources in U.S. History and Literature National Humanities Center, 2007. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/protest/text10/text10read.htm>. This is a teaching

resource which explores many debates throughout African-American history and provides not only background reading, but also discussion questions and resources for further study.

Student Reading List

Students will receive a reading packet with key excerpts from the following works.

Farebrother, Rachel, and Miriam Thaggert, eds. *A History of the Harlem Renaissance*. Cambridge University Press, 2021. Farebrother and Thaggert give an in-depth overview of the Harlem Renaissance including the social and political forces involved. It also highlights major artistic contributors.

Hayes, Jeffreen M., et al. *Augusta Savage, Renaissance Woman*. Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, 2018. Hayes work is considered one of the definitive biographies of Savage and presents her life story along a curated collection of images and analysis of her work.

Johnson, James Weldon. *Along this way: the autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*. Vol. 314. New York: Viking Press, 1933. Johnson's autobiography provides an animated portrayal of his life. It traces his journey from his birth and details his education, role in the Harlem Renaissance, and years as a professor, diplomat, and civil rights reformer.

Kirschke, Amy Helene. *Women Artists of the Harlem Renaissance*. University Press of Mississippi, 2016. Kirschke's book chronicles the challenges of women artists and contextualizes their achievements within the framework of the Harlem Renaissance.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

This curriculum unit will focus on the following Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs):

- *7.1: The student will participate in and contribute to conversations, group discussions, and oral presentations.* Students will use these skills as they participate in class discussions and make oral presentations about Johnson and Savage in their fishbowl activity.
- *7.5: The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of a variety of fictional texts, literary nonfiction, poetry, and drama.* As this is the primary standard for reading, students will practice these skills as they read not only the autobiography and biography of Johnson and Savage, but also as they examine journal articles and Johnson's literary contributions.
- *7.6: The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of a variety of nonfiction texts.* As most of my students struggle with reading and comprehending non-fiction texts, this unit will help the scholars understand iconic biographies through reading, discussion, debate, and writing.
- *7.7: The student will write in a variety of forms to include narrative, expository, persuasive, and reflective, with an emphasis on expository and persuasive writing.* Throughout the unit, students will

write in various forms to prepare for class discussions, summarize ideas, create the children's book and a narrative for their museum exhibit. Using inquiry-based practices, students will further develop the critical thinking, analytical, and close-reading skills needed to help them meet benchmarks on district and state assessments.

¹ "Martin Luther King Jr. Middle in Richmond, VA." GreatSchools.org

² Farebrother and Thaggert, *A History of the Harlem Renaissance*, 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Hutchinson, "Harlem Renaissance," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

⁵ Gates, Smith, and Benston, "The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature," 175.

⁶ Sherrard-Johnson, *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, 6.

⁷ Farebrother and Thaggert, *A History of the Harlem Renaissance*, 3.

⁸ Gates, Henry Louis, "The New Negro and the Black Image: From Booker T. Washington to Alain Locke."

⁹ "Great Migration." *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

¹⁰ Honey, "The Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro," 157-172.

¹¹ Farebrother and Thaggert, *A History of the Harlem Renaissance*, 3.

¹² "The Times and Life of W.E.B. Du Bois at Penn," Penn Today.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Locke, "Forward to The New Negro, An Interpretation."

¹⁵ "Writing in Protest."

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Clarke, "Marcus Garvey: The Harlem Years," 14-19.

¹⁸ "The Times and Life of W.E.B. Du Bois at Penn," Penn Today.

¹⁹ Johnson, *Along This way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*

²⁰ "James Weldon Johnson: A Chronology."

²¹ Johnson, *Along This way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*

²² Ibid.

²³ Savage, "Augusta Savage: An Autobiography," 269.

²⁴ Etinde-Crompton, *Augusta Savage: Sculptor of the Harlem Renaissance*.

²⁵ Hayes, et al, *Augusta Savage, Renaissance Woman*.

²⁶ Kirschke, Amy Helene. *Women Artists of the Harlem Renaissance*, 159.

²⁷ Bey, "Augusta Savage: Sacrifice, Social Responsibility, and Early African American Art Education," 125-40.

²⁸ Ibid.

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