

Topic 2 : Into the Art of Darkness

Axis 3 : Art and Power

Key question : How has art been a powerful tool for African Americans ?

How can art be a powerful tool in the fight for African American recognition ?

Part 1 : FIGHTING FOR VISIBILITY

I- THE NEED FOR A VOICE

Activity 1 : Reading

There is in New York tonight a black woman molding clay by herself in a little bare room, because there is not a single school of sculpture in New York where she is welcome. [...]

There is a colored woman in Chicago who is a great musician. She thought she would like to study at Fontainebleau this summer. [...]

But the application blank of this school says: "I am a white American and I apply for admission to the school."

We can go on the stage; we can be just as funny as white Americans wish us to be; we can play all the sordid parts that America likes to assign to Negroes; but for any thing else there is still small place for us.

And so I might go on. But let me sum up with this: Suppose the only Negro who survived some centuries hence was the Negro painted by white Americans in the novels and essays they have written. What would people in a hundred years say of black Americans? Now turn it around. Suppose you were to write a story and put in it the kind of people you know and like and imagine. You might get it published and you might not. And the "might not" is still far bigger than the "might". The white publishers catering to white folk would say, "It is not interesting" -- to white folk, naturally not.[...] I have in my office a story with all the earmarks of truth. A young man says that he started out to write and had his stories accepted. Then he began to write about the things he knew best about, that is, about his own people. He submitted a story to a magazine which said, "We are sorry, but we cannot take it". "I sat down and revised my story, changing the color of the characters and the locale and sent it under an assumed name with a change of address and it was accepted by the same magazine that had refused it. [...]

W.E.B. Du Bois, *Criteria of Negro Art*, 1926

1- Introduce the document.

2- Read from line 1 to 9 and pick out information about the situation (people – places – activities – problem).

3- Read the end of the text and pick out references to literature and Americans (ethnic groups – aims – writers – publishers – problems).

4- Use what you have understood to explain what W.E.B. Du Bois denounces.

II- I, TOO, SING AMERICA

How do visual artists of the Harlem Renaissance explore black identity and political empowerment?

A) HARLEM RENAISSANCE

A- Work in pairs : student A watches the video on the padlet “Harlem Renaissance” and student B reads the short article on Harlem Renaissance and the information box :

Harlem Renaissance

In the 1920s and 30s, racial prejudice made blacks move to the urban north of the USA. In the predominantly black area of Harlem, New York, a major cultural movement emerged. It is known today as the Harlem Renaissance, but at that time it was called the « New Negro Movement ». The movement reflected the expression of a new racial consciousness for African American artists and intellectuals who believed that, through art, they could fight stereotypes and racial prejudice and thus achieve recognition.

Some of the common themes were the experience of slavery, the effect of institutionalized racism (= legal forms of racism) and the emerging new black identity.

Then in pairs, answer the following questions

1° What was The Harlem Renaissance?

2° When and where did it take place?

3° What categories of artists were involved in this movement?

4° List some of these artists' names

5° Why did many black Americans move to the North at that time?

6° The Harlem Renaissance artists didn't inspire the Civil Rights Movement

TRUE FALSE

7° There were women involved in this African-American movement.

TRUE FALSE

8° The only women involved were the male artists' wives.

TRUE FALSE



B- Look at these paintings with the artists' names and **tick** those who were part of The Harlem Renaissance Movement.



Aaron Douglas, *Aspiration* (1936)



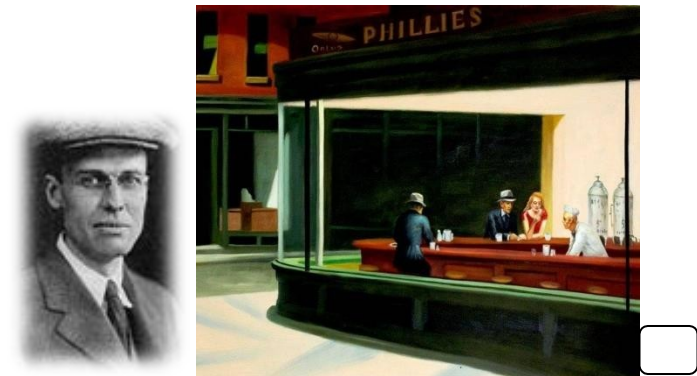
J.M.W. Turner, *Snow Storm* (1842)



Hale Woodruff, *The Mutiny on the Amistad* (1938)



Meta V. Warrick Fuller, *Sorrow* (1934)



Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks* (1942)



James VanDerZee, *Future Expectations* (1926)



Augusta Savage, *Gamin* (1929-1930)



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Irony of a Negro Policeman* (1981)

Tired
by Langston Hughes


I am so tired of waiting,
Aren't you,
For the world to become good
And beautiful and kind?
Let us take a knife
And cut the world in two-
And see what worms are eating
At the rind.

Langston Hughes, *Poem* (1930)

B) « I, too, sing America » by Langston Hughes, 1925

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.
Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.
Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—
I, too, am America.

Langston Hughes, "I, Too", 1925



Langston Hughes, by
Winold Reiss, 1925

1- Read the poem and identify the people mentioned by the pronouns « I » and « they » (physical appearance - situation - attitude)

2- Discuss the intentions of the poet.

3- Explain how the contents and intentions of the poem make it a perfect emblem of the Harlem Renaissance.

Using the 3 documents answer this key question ?

How did African American artists of the Harlem Renaissance use art and literature to challenge racial stereotypes and claim visibility, recognition and equality in American society?

