



Defining a Cultural Landscape: The Harlem Renaissance

Performance Guide

At the intersection of the Great Migration, the Depression and the Jazz Age, the Harlem Renaissance marks a moment in history that gave birth to a cultural explosion. This era embodied poetry and prose, visual art, jazz, theatre and dance. The Harlem Renaissance gave rise to African American artists like Langston Hughes, one of the earliest innovators of jazz poetry; musicians such as Duke Ellington; and modern artists including Jacob Lawrence. These collective voices influenced and shaped America's social, artistic and cultural landscape.

This guide is divided into three parts:

- **Before the Show:** Learn more about Dayton Contemporary Dance Company
- **During the Show:** Find out more about some of the seminal figures of the Harlem Renaissance
- **After the Show:** Dive deeper into the Harlem Renaissance on Flipgrid

BEFORE THE SHOW:

Meet the Artists

Dayton Contemporary Dance Company was founded in 1968 to create performance opportunities for dancers of color. Five decades later, the 10th largest modern contemporary dance company in the nation remains rooted in the African American experience and committed to the development of diverse movement artists on the global stage.



DCDC₂ is an elite cohort of early career performing dance artists comprised of recent graduate and undergraduate dance students. As a pilot program, this company is created to engage a new generation of performing artists and prepare them for success in a new and exciting arts ecosystem. DCDC₂ engages school communities in dance performances every year.



Director of DCDC₂, **Shonna Hickman-Matlock** has taught, performed and choreographed modern dance works, plus developed education and outreach programs for three and a half decades. Under her leadership, numerous dance artists have transitioned into DCDC's main company and other professional dance companies. She was a principal dancer with DCDC from 1983 to 1995.



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[Dayton Contemporary Dance Company](#)

Think and Reflect

The period generally identified with the Harlem Renaissance occurred approximately 100 years ago. The influences of the artists who worked then are still deeply felt today. Which contemporary artists do you think will still be relevant 100 years from now?

DURING THE SHOW:

Check it out!

During the performance there is a brief costume change at which time the dancers are off-stage. During the intermission, listen to the narration and see if you catch all these Harlem Renaissance references in popular music, movies and theater.

- The Cotton Club
- Their Eyes Were Watching God
- Cab Calloway
- The Apollo
- The Moonwalk

Artist Spotlights:



Jacob Lawrence was an American painter and the most widely acclaimed African American artist of the 20th century. While his career came after the Harlem Renaissance, he spent his formative years as an artist in Harlem. His most famous series of paintings is called *The Migration Series* (1941).



Zora Neale Hurston was one of the pre-eminent writers of twentieth-century African American literature. Anthropologist, folklorist and novelist, Hurston was closely associated with the 1920s Harlem Renaissance and influenced such writers as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison. Listen for her novel Their Eyes Were Watching God.



Countee Cullen was an iconic figure of the Harlem Renaissance, known for his poetry, fiction and plays. His acclaimed debut volume of poetry, *Color*, was published in 1925. Listen for three of his poems: “For My Grandmother,” “For Paul Laurence Dunbar” and “For A Lady I Know.”



Claude McKay was a Jamaican-American poet and prose writer best known for his novels, essays and poems depicting peasant life in Jamaica and protesting racial and economic inequities. He successfully blended his African heritage and his love for British poetry. Listen for his poem “I Know My Soul.”



Langston Hughes was a writer whose poems, columns, novels and plays made him a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance. He was among the first to use jazz rhythms and dialect to depict the life of urban Black people. Listen for his poem “A Dream Deferred.”

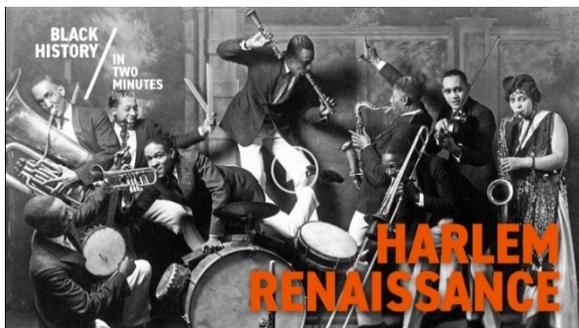
AFTER THE SHOW:



Explore the historical time period and personalities featured in *Defining a Cultural Landscape: The Harlem Renaissance*. This Flipgrid topic can be accessed with the **guest password** **muse123!**. Your responses won't be made public to anyone except Muse Machine. We may like your response well enough that we want to share it with the community, but we will ask your teacher's permission first.

Flipgrid: Birth of a Cultural Identity

<https://flipgrid.com/8b40d3a1>



Centuries of slavery, segregation laws, and racial prejudice birthed what is now known as the Great Migration. This mass movement of African Americans from the rural South to the industrial cities of the north was an attempt to find freedom and new opportunities.

Following World War I, a large portion of African Americans settled in the city of Harlem in New York during the 1920s and 1930s. This time frame became known as the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural birth of artistic creative expression in theater, music (particularly Jazz and Blues), visual art, fashion, literature, poetry and dance. Harlem became a cultural hub exploding with creativity.

Watch the video, think about the DCDC performance and then answer:

**Which genre of artistic expression would you use to express yourself creatively and culturally?
Why is art an important mode of cultural identity?**

Respond in a short video (2:00 minutes) at the link above.

Attachments

- **PBS NewsHour Extra: The Harlem Renaissance**, a grades 7-12 lesson plan by Daniella K. Garran, Marston Mills, Mass.
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons-plans/the-harlem-renissance/>