

A Generation: Lost and Found

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Overview

This unit is designed to be part of a course in American Literature and Communications. A teacher of secondary English could use it as a bridge between the study of F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God. However, it can be used as a self-contained teaching unit to help students explore the Harlem Renaissance through music, poetry, short fiction and film. One of the primary objectives is to help students discover the richness of the Harlem Renaissance, a brief but important period in our literary history. The knowledge the students gain will reinforce a sense of continuity between the music and literature of seventy or eighty years ago and contemporary art forms that they enjoy. An additional objective is to design a teaching unit that will serve the various populations in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. It will augment the literature units in the secondary curriculum that explore the twenties as a study of the lost generation or the American dream. It will create a new unit of study that might also be used for Black History Month activities in February of each year. My final objective will be to encourage students to write their own poetry and short fiction that reflects their concerns and feelings as they move forward in the twenty-first century.

To achieve these objectives, this unit contains the following components: selected blues music from my own collection, poetry and short fiction by Langston Hughes, including a film of Hughes' short story, Cora Unashamed.

Rationale

Americans are always putting labels on things: historical periods, literary movements, generations, and more. Today's youth are nostalgic about the 60s; the baby boomers are nostalgic about the 50s; the 20s seem to have a cross-generation appeal. If one takes a quick look inside the decade known as the Roaring 20s, we find the lost generation and the Harlem Renaissance.

What is so fascinating about the twenties? The decade has been recorded in literature, on film, in music, and history as a time for great change and excitement. After teaching F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby every year for almost fifteen years, I have fallen into a romantic trap. In addition to reading the novel, I watch the Academy Award winning film, starring Robert Redford and Mia Farrow. I must watch this film of Fitzgerald's novel three or four times with each class. Always, I am enchanted by the splendid cinematography, costuming, and the spirited music and dance of what is also called the jazz age. Forgetting that these are fictional characters, I, once again, actively dislike Daisy Buchanan for her shallowness and selfishness on one hand, but I admire her knowledge of how to survive in a man's world. On the other hand, I admire Jay

Gatsby's ability to pull himself up from nothing to tremendous material wealth, but I pity him for his lost dreams and his tragic death. I am very much like my students who are in love with the sixties, but who fail to see the dark side of that time. Films about the sixties do depict the racially motivated street riots, the political assassinations, the substance abuse, or the lack of morals, but they do so in a manner that only serves to further romanticize the era. The same thing can be said about the 20s.

So, what were the twenties really like? I know that my parents' existence was nothing like that depicted in the novels of Fitzgerald and Hemingway. They were born in the South, only two generations away from the time of slavery. Like so many other African Americans, they were part of the Great Migration to the North that occurred during the 20s. Life in the North was hard, but they found it better than life had been in Florida and Virginia. They knew very little about Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and nothing about Gertrude Stein, the patroness of the Lost Generation.

Interestingly enough, they also knew nothing about Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jean Toomer, Marcus Garvey and other writers, leaders and thinkers who were the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance. New York City and Harlem were both geographically and intellectually distant from the steel mills and kitchens of white folk where my parents and grandparents worked in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. Surprising to me, the works of visual artists, poets, novelists and civil rights activists did not reach the ears and eyes of the common people. My mother explained that African American history and literature was not taught in northern schools. One of her friends, who had attended Southern, Black schools, often chided my mother because she knew nothing about her heritage. How could she because the history and literature had not been taught in her school? Also, access to information was very limited. Poor people often could not afford to buy the daily newspaper; there was no radio or television. We often forget that twenty-four hour television broadcasting became the norm within the last twenty years. My parents' generation received much of their news from the weekly newsreels that ran along the films and other short subjects in the neighborhood theaters. My mother has told me that it was not until the militant Black Panther Party challenged the pacifist tactics of the Southern Christian Leadership Committee, headed by Martin Luther King, Jr., that the work of African American writers came to her attention. I was a young teacher in the late sixties before African-American history and literature became a part of the Pittsburgh school district's curriculum. African-American literature also was not part of the curriculum that of the college and university from which I received my degrees. Even to this day, many of my students do not know much about this rich period in American history and culture because African-American literature seems to be out of favor or vogue at this time.

In the years between World War I and the Great Depression, a spirit of self-determination echoed the American Progressive movement, and, in part, manifested itself in the Harlem Renaissance. Progressivism furthered and improved the lives of working class Americans, especially under President Woodrow Wilson who, among other things, broke up the giant trusts, campaigned for workers compensation and appointed the first Jewish American to the Supreme Court (Bailey 709). As America moved out of the Great War and in to the "Roaring Twenties," creativity flourished and the Harlem Renaissance began. This period is also called the Negro Renaissance

or the New Negro Renaissance; it represented an "artistic and socio-cultural awakening among African Americans" (Smith 340).

Gertrude Stein is credited with applying a label, "the lost generation," to an entire group of American, ex-patriot writers. Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald are the notable members of this group. The circumstances surrounding Stein's first use of this term are reported variously as a chance reference to the slipshod work of a group of automobile mechanics with whom she had done business. It was not intended as an indictment of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, et al. Indeed, Hemingway strove to prove that his generation was not lost. In most sources, the appellation, "lost generation," is regularly used to describe the writers who lived, loved, lost and wrote about their existence during World War I and on in to the 1920s.

This "Lost Generation" was consumed by the effects of World War I, a war that interrupted the lives of the world's youth just as they were old enough to burst onto the world scene as young adults. Instead of the future they had expected, many were shipped far away from their homes, everyone and everything that they knew, and they were taught to kill other human beings. Many were injured or killed themselves. The effort to escape the war and their memories of the war often manifested itself in alcohol abuse, battles with depression and a sense of guilt that they had survived---that they were alive and their comrades were dead. Ernest Hemingway emerged as a reluctant spokesperson for this "lost generation."

Ernest Hemingway was born in 1899 and attempted to enlist in the United States Army, but he was rejected because of an eye injury. Because he truly wanted to serve, he volunteered to serve as an ambulance driver on the Italian front.

Not only were men affected by the war, but also the role of women in society and the lifestyles of women changed dramatically during World War I. Women cut their hair into short bobs, wore make-up, smoked cigarettes in public, raised the hemlines of their skirts and worked outside of their homes. Thus, the name "flappers" was born.

"Woman power" was felt on the political front as well. They grew tired of their husbands and sons spending their entire paychecks on alcohol and gambling. For the first time, women took on the role of activists as they protested and fought for the prohibition of the sales of alcoholic beverages.

Simultaneously, another generation of writers, the Negro population, was finding itself in the New York suburb of Harlem. The label applied to a generation that found itself while Hemingway and Fitzgerald were "lost" is the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance coincides with the end of World War I and ends with the onset of the Great Depression. Many Negroes migrated from the farmlands of the Deep South to the industrial centers of the North. Between 1920 and 1930, it is variously reported that nearly 750,000 Blacks traveled to the North; this mass movement to the north has been labeled the Great Migration. Harlem boasted the highest concentration of African-Americans with approximately 975,000 blacks living in a three-mile area (Rowen 1).

When Harlem was built in 1904 it was designed for the upper class white community. It consisted of townhouses, luxury apartment buildings and single-family homes. The community was built on speculation, but it was not marketed properly. To the consternation of the developers, there were no buyers. So the area was opened up to the growing Black population around 1914. In the true sense of the word, Harlem was a ghetto, but in its youth it was a somewhat fashionable section of the city with a large Black, middle class population. Because New York is a port city, Blacks from the south, Africa and the West Indies also found their way to Harlem making it a truly cosmopolitan area.

Harlem grew into a center for Black culture where the creative arts in literature, visual art and music flourished. The members of the Harlem Renaissance were often called "New Negroes" because they had a newly found sense of pride in their heritage, a desire for political and social equality in their work as well as a certain love for their community. From the mid -1920s to the mid -1930s, approximately sixteen Black writers published many volumes of poetry and fiction pieces. They used Harlem's growing popularity as "a unique opportunity to do what reconstruction after the Civil War had not done: create a positive public image of blacks as thinking, creative human beings in American society.

Harlem also became the center of the NAACP, which was founded in 1909 by W.E.B. Du Bois. At this time Marcus Garvey founded the Urban League, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association, UNIA. The purpose of the UNIA was to promote the well being of African Americans. The UNIA newsletter, The Negro World, targeted a different group from the NAACP organ, The Crisis. Unlike the UNIA, the NAACP was open to all people, colored or otherwise. In fact, there were several different white board members on the committee board (Ramparsad 274).

More importantly, the Harlem Renaissance was significant to American urban history because it brought attention to a city that was growing rapidly due to the increase in black population, and to the problems African Americans faced living in New York City.

The Harlem Renaissance artists with the power and forcefulness of their work insisted that the Black person be accepted as "a collaborator and participant in American civilization" in the words of the educator and critic Alain Locke.

Harlem newspapers and journals such as The Crisis, The Survey Graphic and Opportunity published the work of new and established Black writers. Locke is closely associated with the birth of the Harlem Renaissance. As a professor at Howard University, he helped encourage Black writers to explore themes relating the treatment of Blacks by white writers, feelings of alienation, the search for a true home, and the criteria by which African-American writing was evaluated and appreciated (Reuben 2). Also encouraged by the NAACP, many writers "created a blatant social protest trying to break the color barrier by shouting directly into the faces of hatred and unfairness" (Rosenblatt 91). To encourage and support the intellectually gifted young people, the journals sponsored literary contests that encouraged creative production and rewarded it with cash prizes and social introductions to the top writers of the time.

The Harlem Renaissance changed American culture, in general. Because the Harlem Renaissance appealed to a mixed audience, including the white book-buying market, African-American literature gained popularity. Although African-American publications like The Crisis and Opportunity published the work of their own people, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance relied primarily on white publishing houses and white-owned magazines. A chief aim of the Harlem Renaissance was "to push open the door to mainstream white periodicals and publishers" (Africana). There were a number of individuals who deeply disapproved of patronage by wealthy white patrons. Historian, Irvin Huggins, denounced the writers of the Harlem Renaissance "because the intellectuals who defined it became mimics of whites, wearing clothes and using manners of sophisticated whites, earning for themselves reputations as [uppity] from the very people they were supposed to be championing" (Bascom 13). In addition, W.E.B. DuBois was critical of works such as Claude McKay's Home to Harlem (1928), for he thought it appealed to the demands of white readers and publishers.

Zora Neale Hurston, who, for a time, was part of the Harlem Renaissance inner circle, also sustained a seriously battered ego at the hand of her critics. Richard Wright, agreed with critics like Irvin Huggins. Wright criticized Hurston because her work lacked the anger that is so characteristic of his own work. He thought that her little stories were a shameful attempt to appeal to a white audience(Washington xvii).

Today, I believe that the work of Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes is held in high regard just like that of Richard Wright.

Hurston and Hughes became quite friendly in 1925, and, at one point, collaborated on a play entitled Mule Bone. Hurston was born in Florida and grew up in an incorporated Black town where her father was mayor. When she went to work in a white family's home, she was lucky enough to find a patroness in this home who financed her education at a prep school in Maryland. She later attended Howard University and Columbia University where she studied with famed anthropologist, Franz Boas. Hurston won a fellowship to study the culture and folk history of Black people in her native Florida, thus beginning her writing career. Her talent as a writer brought her in contact with Langston Hughes and a patroness whom they shared. The financial support proved to be a mixed blessing since it helped both Hughes and Hurston continue their writing, but it drove a wedge between the two of them and between them and some of their staunch critics, other Black intellectuals. Hurston's short story, "Bone of Contention," evolved from her research into folktales indigenous to Florida. Hughes was very much taken with the story and he and Hurston agreed that Hughes would write a play version of the story since he was better at writing dramas than she was. For her part, Hurston was to add the local color to the play since color was her strength. Once the three-act play entitled Mule Bone was written in 1931, Hurston and Hughes began to have their problems. Arguments over the authorship of Mule Bone prevented the play from ever being produced or printed in their lifetimes. The unpleasantness between them was never resolved, and the two great writers of the Harlem Renaissance never spoke to each other again. A single sentence by Hughes tells the entire story: "This play was never done because the authors fell out" (Hughes, Mule Bone, 5).

If you are curious about the short story and the play, they can be found in a single volume that also contains excerpts from biographies and letters written by and about Hughes and

Hurston. Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life is edited by George Houston Bass and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Its cover states that it contains the complete story of the Mule Bone controversy. This assertion is not entirely true because Hurston never commented on the controversy; so there is nothing extant in her own words to explain her side of the controversy. I did a great of searching to find this book, but I was ultimately disappointed by what I found.

As George Bass points out the "...use of broad comic types in the play [which] can be easily viewed in terms of the stigmas and offensive stereotypes of minstrel shows and the plantation tradition of American literature" ("Another Bone" 3). The subject matter unfortunately renders both "The Bone of Contention" and Mule Bone unsuitable for use in the classroom. Bass continues

"The expansion of moral and aesthetic consciousness that has occurred in American society since 1960 has produced a social climate that does not allow one to laugh at broad comic interpretations of black people. Many of the comic characters, comic devices, and forms of laughter that were sources of renewal and release within the black community before 1960 are now inhibited by the politics of race and gender" (3).

To explore the roots of Hurston's and Hughes' work, I would suggest that this is suitable work for students who are juniors or seniors in college. Graduate students would probably be the most suitable candidates to study this literature because they should be mature enough to look beyond the negative images and focus on the thematic content. Work from this period might be part of a course of study that explores the origins of the minstrel show, early films that include the Steppin' Fetchit character and his imitators, early children's cartoons, and the Amos and Andy radio and television series.

Unlike Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes has enjoyed a long and sustained run of popularity. Hurston and her work were forgotten for several decades until Alice Walker, author of The Color Purple re-discovered Hurston's work, and Walker was instrumental in bringing Hurston to the attention of scholars and the reading public in the 80s. Langston Hughes was born in Lawrence, Kansas where he lived with his grandmother, Mary Langston. His great uncle, Charles Henry Langston, was the first Black American to hold a public office in Lawrence. After his parents divorced, Hughes visited his mother in Cleveland and attended high school there. As a very young person, Hughes fell under the influence of the poetry of Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg.

Hughes' free verse is likened to Whitman's innovative use of poetic form. Like Whitman, Hughes strove to cast off old forms and forge a new form of poetic expression that did not copy or imitate the forms that were revered by his contemporaries.

Hughes enrolled in Columbia University where he maintained a B+ average, but he dropped out of school because it was unfulfilling. His "Theme for English B" has long been one of my favorites because the college English classroom is a frightening and unfamiliar place for many African-American kids. Everyone is playing by a proscribed set of rules, and you do not even know the name of the game. After leaving college, Hughes worked as a mess man on an ocean liner where he was exposed to the philosophies of Marxism and socialism (Ostrom 33). Hughes

returned to Harlem in 1924, but he was off traveling again the following year. When Hughes settled down again, he chose Washington, D.C. Our nation's capital is the birthplace of Hughes' most beloved character, Simple.

The Simple stories were wildly popular and always anticipated by a faithful audience of readers of The Chicago Defender. The Simple stories reached readers all across the country. Simple represents the common Black man who is perceived as passive and lazy. In reality, he is assertive, well centered and aware of the world around him. The Simple stories have the flavor of African folk tales. Coincidentally, this interest in folk tales is almost certainly one of the interests that Hughes shared with Zora Hurston. During his travels to the Congo, Hughes observed the use of plays on words and one-upmanship, commonly called playing the dozens. In Henry Louis Gates' book, The Signifying Monkey, Gates notes the use of the African trickster figure in African culture. Gates praises Hughes for his exploration of the vernacular culture.

Although the Harlem Renaissance was short-lived, it changed forever the public perception and dynamics of All-American literature. More doors were opened to writers from the generations, such as Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright in the 1930s and 1940s. The latter part of the twentieth century saw the popularity of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Most importantly, the Harlem Renaissance was proof to thousands of African Americans that they were capable of becoming successful writers and poets, and it will be remembered as a turning point in the history of Black America.

Objectives:

To sustain our school district's literacy initiative, it is imperative that we, as teachers, develop strategies to capture the interest of our students and help them see that literacy need not be reading of the "literary classics," analysis of the grammatical structure of sentences, or what they see as the laborious writing of essays. Literacy is an integral part of all of our lives, the lives of young people as well. Words, words, words are around us all of the time. My hope is that the students will embrace the diversity of American life, culture and thought during a time that has had great influence on modern times.

This teaching unit begins with music. I use Isaac Hayes' "Theme from Shaft" as my anticipatory set because it will get the students' attention. Most of the students have seen or have heard about the remake of **Shaft** with Samuel L. Jackson in the starring role, and the theme song has been widely played in all of the media. Then, I introduce the concept of blues and jazz music as a distinctive American art form and relate it to the work of contemporary artists like Hayes and then I work backward in time through the music of Billie Holiday and Robert Johnson. Once students understand what the blues is, I ask them to bring in some of their own blues music. However, teachers should preview the student music before playing it in the classroom since so much of today's popular music contains lyrics that are inappropriate for the classroom. Once you approve the music for classroom use, you may include it in your discussion of theme and content. This brief unit is rounded out by the inclusion of a short fiction piece, Langston Hughes' short story, "Cora Unashamed."

Strategies:**THE TEACHING PLAN****Time allotment:**

The entire unit will take 1 to 2 weeks to complete.

Pennsylvania State Standards for Communication:

These activities are aligned with the Communications Standards established by the Department of Education for the State of Pennsylvania. On most days, more than one standard will be addressed.

Communications Standards for Pennsylvania are listed in Appendix A.

Materials:

Teachers will need the following materials:

- a CD and/or an audio tape player
- a television monitor and vcr
- a selection of blues music
- a copy of Cora Unashamed on video.
- drawing paper or sketch pad
- color markers, crayons, oil markers

Students will need the following materials:

- a copy of the text, "Cora Unashamed" by Langston_Hughes
- blues music from their personal collections
- a notebook or an adequate supply of loose leaf paper
- writing tools: blue or black ink pens

Day One.

Standards addressed: 3, 5, 6, and 7.

Anticipatory Set.

As the students enter the classroom, play Isaac Hayes' Theme from Shaft. This selection does not qualify as a blues piece, but it will grab the students' attention and they will be likely to listen to the real blues pieces you choose for them from Hayes' work.

Explain that today, we are going to begin a study of the blues through music: poetry and song.

Teacher Input.

The background for this informational section relies heavily on an article that appeared in the February 2000 issue of Literary Cavalcade, authored by Catherine Bowman, in honor of Black History Month. There are two distinctive types of blues poems according to subject matter and thematic content:

...the writer expresses a 'blues' sensibility, but does not follow a traditional blues form....The second type ...incorporates the content of the blues and the traditional form of a blues song. The traditional blues song consists of several three-line stanzas. The second line is a refrain and repeats...the first line. The third line serves as a response to the first two lines. All three lines rhyme. (19-20).

Activities.

Now, play Isaac Hayes' "By the Time I Get to Phoenix," a piece of music that is innovative because it begins with a lengthy monologue chronicling the ups and downs of a romantic relationship. The speaker realizes that the relationship has soured, and, yet he hopes that it can be revived. As he drives away from his beloved, toward Phoenix, he imagines how she will react when she discovers that he has left her for the last time. By the time he reaches Phoenix, he hopes that the woman in his life will realize how much she loves, misses and needs him.

Checking for Understanding/Student Assessment.

After listening to the song, ask the students to re-tell the story told by Hayes in the monologue. They may write the re-telling or they may re-tell the story orally if you wish to use a discussion format for the class.

Ask if the lyrics of the song fit any of the models for blues songs. Answers will vary.

Move backward in musical time, and play Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit." Again ask if this song fits any of the three models for blues songs. Finally, ask students to re-tell the story Holiday sings for them. Again, the re-telling may be written or oral.

Day Two.

Standards addressed: 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7.

Anticipatory Set.

As the students enter, play Lou Rawls' rendition of "Strange Fruit." Point out that this is the same song they heard on Day One, but this rendition has a different quality. Ask students to talk about the differences in phrasing, tone and of course the artist's rendering of the song.

Teacher Input.

- Orally review the subject matter for blues songs.
- Read Langston Hughes' "Morning After" from Literary Cavalcade.
- Ask the students if this poem matches any of the criteria for the blues that were established yesterday? Answers will vary.
- Give a brief overview of Hughes' life and his significant contributions to the movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. Now that students have an understanding of what the blues song is, ask them to bring in some music from their own personal collections for use in the classroom.
- Read with the students Langston Hughes' poem, "Lonesome Place" from Literary Cavalcade.
- Point out the blues poem qualities. Help them see that the blues need not always be sad, but addresses many aspects of everyday living.
- Again, move backward in time and read the lyrics to a Robert Johnson song, "Crossroad Blues." Note that this poem follows the traditional blues format: number of lines, rhyme and subject matter. Then provide another musical selection by playing a song from any blues musician. Blues Masters, Volume 7, Blues Revival is a good choice for a variety of blues classics.

Days Three and Four.

Standards addressed: 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7.

Anticipatory Set.

As the students enter, play some blues music from your personal collection or music that has been provided by the students, and reviewed by you prior to use for the entire class.

Teacher Input.

Activities.

Today students will write their own blues poems. Review the subject matter for the blues.

Once students have generated a rough draft, they will be instructed to revise their drafts and create a visual rendition of their poems. Remind students that they do not need to be able to draw to do this final part of the assignment. Provide everyone with a sheet of average quality sketch paper, a selection of crayons, washable color markers or watercolor crayons. They may select the

colors to match their mood and the mood of the poem they have written, write the poem on the sketch paper and decorate the poster they have made as much as they like. These posters can be displayed in the classroom. Prior to completion of the posters, discuss with the students how the posters will be evaluated. This discussion will generate a rubric that the teacher will be able to use to help assign a grade to the project. The discussion and rubric will help the teacher and students focus on what they need to do to be successful in this effort. I like to assign a pass/fail grade to this kind of work since I am not an art teacher and this is not an art class. Everyone can succeed if they make the effort to complete the project.

Day Five.

Standards addressed: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Anticipatory Set.

Read one of Langston Hughes' short, musical poems. Any of the Tales of Simple will make good choices because of their humor and representations of human situations. Briefly, reiterate Hughes' role in the Harlem Renaissance movement. Then, introduce his short story "Cora Unashamed."

Teacher Input.

Classroom Activities.

Pre-reading strategies:

Teachers, practice your dramatic reading and read the first four-six paragraphs with the students and assign the remainder of the story for homework. Notify the students that there will be a short reading quiz. This tried and true strategy should encourage everyone, even the reluctant readers, to do the reading. By reading the opening of the story, you should be able to instill the desire in the students to want to find out how the story ends.

Day Six.

Standards Addressed: 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7.

Teacher Input.

Administer a brief reading quiz on the short story before discussion. This will help keep the reluctant students and readers on task since they must do the reading to pass the quiz.

1. What is the setting for the story? Where and when does it take place?
2. What holds Cora in such a terrible living and working situation? Why did her brothers and sisters all leave Melton?

3. Cora's life is about losses. How does she handle the loss of Joe, Josie and Jessie?
4. Pick one adjective to describe Cora, Elizabeth, and Jessie.
5. Why do you think the story is called "Cora Unashamed?"

Days Seven through Nine.

Standards Addressed: 2, 5 and 7.

If possible, show the film version of Cora Unashamed that aired on PPS in October 2000. The film is available from PBS. See the teacher reading list for information.

Teacher Input.

A viewing guide will prove helpful in providing a focus for student viewing.

Throughout the entire film, look for the answers to these questions:

1. Keep a list of things that you see in the film that help establish the time period of the story. For example, the doctor makes house calls, funerals are held in the home, etc.
2. List at least five things that are presented differently from the story or omitted from the story altogether.

During the viewing time, ask students to answer these questions which follow the order of events in the film.

3. What town is the setting for the story? What year is it when the story begins?

Melton, Iowa. 1916

4. Select two or three words or phrases to describe the characters as they are presented in the story.

Cora

Arthur

Elizabeth *Answers will vary.*

Mary

Josie

Jessie

5. Why do you think it is important that Elizabeth be the first lady in town to own a Maytag washing machine?

She is a social climber and very status conscious.

6. What is Cora's reason for not using the washing machine?

She says it takes too much time.

7. Discuss your reaction the way Cora responded to Josie's illness and death?
Cora tried to ignore the cough as if it would go away. When Josie was dying, she threw herself in to baking for Elizabeth as if the illness could be ignored out of existence.

8. What is Elizabeth's reaction to Josie's illness and death? Arthur? Mary? And Jessie?
Elizabeth makes an awkward expression of sympathy, then it is business as usual. Arthur and Mary make an awkward, but heartfelt expression of sympathy. Jessie tries to take Josie's place as Cora's daughter. Cora is like a mother to her.

9. Why have all of Cora's brothers and sisters moved away from Melton?
There is no work for colored people in Melton.

10. What do you think keeps Cora in Melton?
A sense of duty

11. In the first flashback of Cora and Joe, we see why Cora loves him. What does he say or do in this scene?
He is a romantic and writes a love poem for her.

12. In your own words, describe the relationship between Jessie and Cora.
Answers will vary.
They become like a mother and a daughter because Mrs. Studevant is so cold and critical of Jessie.

13. Why is Jessie a constant embarrassment to her mother?
Jessie does not learn quickly and Elizabeth thinks she is dumb.

14. How are the Arthur and Elizabeth different in their views about raising children?
Arthur is tolerant of Jessie's individuality, but Elizabeth is mean-spirited and unbending. Her punishment is often harsh and unreasonable.

15. Why do you think Arthur always defers to Elizabeth's wishes?
He is not assertive and he loves Elizabeth blindly.

Time Passes and Jessie grows up.

16. How do the following people react to Jessie's romantic interest in Willy?
Arthur – He thinks that the Matsoulis family has done well for themselves and that Willy is a nice boy.
Elizabeth – She is concerned that Willy is Greek.
Cora – She is happy that Jessie has found a nice boy.

17. In a private conversation, we see that Arthur and Elizabeth are not equally happy in the way their lives have turned out. Explain.

Elizabeth is a doctor's daughter and her father did not think that the son of a country storeowner was good enough for her. But since Arthur studied to be an accountant, this made him satisfactory in the doctor's eyes. Arthur thinks that he has provided well for Elizabeth, but there is the suggestion that she is dissatisfied.

18. In the second Cora and Joe flashback, we learn where Joe is from and where he works. Where did he come from and where does he work?

He came to Melton from California, and he works at the livery stable.

19. Cora and Jessie talk about love. Why did Cora say she fell in love with Joe?

His eyes were full of love.

20. Why does Elizabeth object to Jessie's interest in Willy?

Willy is a foreigner. He is Greek.

21. When Jessie begins to behave oddly, what is the reason?

She is pregnant with Willy's baby.

22. Why does Jessie ask Cora to tell her mother her secret?

She is afraid to tell her mother because her mother is always angry with her. Jessie is afraid of her mother.

23. In the third Cora and Joe flashback, we learn that Joe is on the run from the authorities.

Why?

He belongs to a communist organization.

24. What is the IWW?

Industry Workers of America

25. What is the real reason for Mrs. Studevant's shopping trip to Kansas City?

To arrange an abortion for Jessie

26. While Jessie and Elizabeth are away in Kansas City, Cora sees a vision of Jessie and Josie as little girls. The vision frightens Cora. What do you think was happening at the time Cora had the vision?

Josie was having the abortion. There is a very strong, almost supernatural bond, between Jessie and Cora.

27. When they return from Kansas City, Elizabeth won't let Cora go near Jessie. Why?

She does not want to Cora to find out what happened in Kansas City. She thinks that she can keep what she has done a secret from Cora.

28. What does the doctor say is the reason for Josie's illness?

A bacterial infection

29. What is the significance of the tense exchange between Cora and Elizabeth over serving

Jessie peppermint tea?

Cora knows Jessie better than her own mother.

30. Why is the Matsoulis family business closed down?

Elizabeth has engineered an action by the health department to close them down and run the family out of town.

31. Why does Elizabeth want the Matsoulis family out of town?

She wants Willy and his family far away from Melton.

30. In the final Cora and Joe flashback, we learn why Joe has left Melton. What is the reason?

Sometime tipped the sheriff to his identity and he must move on.

31. Summarize what Cora says to Jessie's family at the end of the story.

Answers will vary.

Who Said?

32. "It's no good come out of white and colored love."

Cora's mother

33. "He's a Greek"

Elizabeth

34. "Tell me your secrets...a girl with fire in her eyes has plenty of secrets..."

Joe

35. "Sometimes being white is not good enough?"

Cora

Works Cited/Teacher Reading List

Africana.com. <http://www.africana.com> Accessed 27 June 2001.

Every month is Black History Month. This is a permanent site devoted to African-American issues: history, lifestyle, health and more. It changes often and is a good ongoing source of information.

A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein. Robert Bartlett Haas, Ed. Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1973.

This is the essential Gertrude Stein. The book contains samples of Stein's work and looks at the various trends in her writing beginning with her college themes and concluding with her last works until the time of her death.

Baker, George and Walter Driscoll. Gurdjieff in America: An Overview.

[Http://www.bmrc.berkeley.edu/people/rhodges/html/G-baker.html](http://www.bmrc.berkeley.edu/people/rhodges/html/G-baker.html) Accessed 27 June 2001;

An overview of the philosophy and work of George I. Gurdjieff, a psychologist whose teachings involved the study of the self. Gurdjieff influenced leaders of the Harlem Renaissance. This is a one-stop site on this topic.

Baldwin, James. "The Discovery of What It Means to be an American." Black American Literature Essays.. Darwin T. Turner, Ed. Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1969.

113-120.

This is a philosophical look at what it means to be American whether the writer is Henry James or James Baldwin. This is good background reading for the teacher.

Blues Masters, Volume 7: Blues Revival. Rhino Records Inc.:1993.

This compilation contains seventeen selections by blues greats B.B. King, Albert King, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker and others. It can be purchased anywhere music CDs and books are sold.

Bowman, Catherine. Old Man Blues Got You: The Blues in Song and Poem. Literary Cavalcade Magazine. February 2000: 18-21.

This article is a concise introduction to the blues through the study of poetry and music written for high school students. It is a good one stop introduction to the topic.

Ellison, Ralph. "On Becoming a Writer." Black American Literature Essays.. Darwin T. Turner, Ed. Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1969. 103-111.

This is an unusual opportunity to read what a writer has to say about writing, both his own and the work of other significant writers.

ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre\American Collection. This site contains teacher resources, teaching guides, timelines and learning links for the American Collection series. Accessed 27 June 2001.

<http://www.pbs.org/wpg/masterpiece/americancollection/amc.html>

This site is a comprehensive site for all of the series entries. Airtimes, lesson plans and background information and purchasing information is available. Cora Unashamed is available for \$19.95 plus shipping and handling. Call 1-800-PLAY-PBS.

"Harlem Renaissance." The Circle Association

This site contains links to thousands of sites related to the Harlem Renaissance. Accessed 27

June 2001.

<http://www.math.buffalo.edu/~sww/0history/harlem.renaissance.html>

Hayes, Isaac. Isaac Hayes Greatest Hits. 1995. Fantasy, inc.

This CD is a compilation of Hayes' best music. "The Theme from Shaft," "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" and other hits are included.

Hemingway: A Collection of Essays. Robert P. Weeks, Editor. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962.

This compilation is part of the Twentieth Century Views series and contains fifteen essays on Hemingway's work, an excellent chronology, and a selected bibliography.

Holiday, Billie. Billie Holiday: The Complete Decca Recordings. 1991 MCA Records Inc.

This compilation contains all of Holiday's recordings, some are multiple versions of her signature works.

Hughes, Langston. "Cora Unashamed."

The text of the short story can be downloaded from the NCTE web site that also contains a biography and essay on the author, author links, an online teachers guide, teacher resources and lesson plans, as well as a writer's workshop for creative writing an Advanced Placement classes. <http://www.ncteamericancollection.org/cora.htm>

Hughes, Langston and Zora Neale Hurston. Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life. George Houston Bass and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Eds. New York: Harper Perennial Press, 1991.

This book is edited by Bass and Gates, Jr., two well-known scholars. It includes the full text of Hurston's short story and the controversial play that Hughes and Hurston collaborated on. In addition, it contains excerpts from Hurston and Hughes biographers as well as critical commentaries.

Jemie, Onwuchekwa. Langston Hughes: An Introduction to Poetry. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.

This book contains a detailed Hughes timeline and careful analysis of his most famous poems.

Johnson, James Weldon. "Selected Poems." Harlem Renaissance Poetry and Prose Index. May 2000. Accessed: 21 February 2001. <http://www.nku.edu/~diesmanj/johnson/html>

This is a comprehensive and convenient compilation of Johnson's poems. These works are not readily accessible in community libraries.

Jones, LeRoi. "City of Harlem and Cold Hurt and Sorrow (Streets of Despair) ." Black American Literature Essays.. Darwin T. Turner, Ed. Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1969. 131-137.

Jones, who is much younger than the Harlem Renaissance writers, discusses what Harlem has come to mean to all Americans.

Kent, Edith. African American History. Online. Netscape. 1999.
www.Africanamericanhistory/Garvey/..."DuBois/Washington".com
This is a good basic source of general information about Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois.

"Profile: Director Deborah Pratt discusses a new film airing on "Masterpiece Theater," "Cora Unashamed." Electric Library. Accessed 21 May 2001.
<www.elibrary.com.id/192/192/getdoc.cgi?id=19685403x127y65148w0&clean=1&F>
This is an interesting behind the scenes discussion with the director of the PPS production. It provides useful background for the teacher of Hughes' short story.

Ramparsad, Arnold. The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. DuBois. Pantheon Book: Random House, 1976.
Ramparsad is an authority on W.E.B. DuBois and the Harlem Renaissance. It work is often referred to by other scholars on this period.

Reuben, Paul P. "Chapter 9: Harlem Renaissance - Zora Neale Hurston " *PAL: Perspectives in American Literature- A Research and Reference Guide*. <http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap9/hurston.html>
Contains discussion of Zora Neale Hurston's major works, selected bibliography of books and articles, study guide questions. Accessed 13 April 2001.

Shaw, Samuel. Ernest Hemingway. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1982.
This is a compilation of essays that explore Hemingway's craft. Especially useful topics are "Nihilism and the American Dream," "The Lost Generation," and "Artistry in the Short Story."

Smith, J.N. "ClassicNote on Zora Neale Hurston." *ClassicNotes by GradeSaver*. 2000.
GradeSaver. 1 June 2000. <http://www.gradesaver.com/ClassicNotes/Titles/zora_neal_hurston>.
Accessed 13 April 2001.
GradeSaver is an outstanding for locating information on most of the major works taught in our schools Check GradeSaver before teaching any book..

Washington, Mary Helen. "Introduction." *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Perennial Classic, 1999. i-xxiii.

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Bowman, Catherine. Old Man Blues Got You: The Blues in Song and Poem. *Literary Cavalcade Magazine*. February 2000: 18-21.
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lesson plans, as well as a writer's workshop for creative writing an Advanced Placement classes.
<http://www.ncteamericancollection.org/cora.htm>

Jemie, Onwuchekwa. Langston Hughes: An Introduction to Poetry. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.

This book contains a detailed Hughes timeline and careful analysis of his most famous poems. Students will read selected poems from this book.

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Appendix A

Pennsylvania Content Standards for Communications: Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking

1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.
3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.
4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including narrate, inform, and persuade, in all subject areas.
5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify the purpose, structure and use.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.
9. All students communicate appropriately in business, work and other applied situations.