

Module 2 Year 9:
**The Harlem
Renaissance**
Half Term 1

Name: _____

Teacher: _____

The Harlem Renaissance

Autonomy (noun)	If a person or group has autonomy , they have the power to control what they do.	Protesters demanded local autonomy last month.
Subjugation (noun)	If there is subjugation of a group of people, they have been totally controlled.	Their subjugation led to feelings of hopelessness.

Most consider the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance to be around 1914. The Harlem Renaissance was rooted in the end of the Reconstruction era, when legal segregation made living conditions for African Americans in the South unbearable. The lack of economic opportunities, and, more importantly, the prevalence of racism, prejudice, lynching, and segregation in public spaces all contributed to the intolerable conditions of African Americans.

The Great Migration and the Great War

When the U.S. entered World War I in 1917, jobs previously held by white workers suddenly became available, and industrial expansion in the North provided opportunities for African Americans to seek a new lifestyle. Hundreds of thousands of black people migrated from the South into dense Northern urban areas that offered relatively more economic opportunities and cultural capital. They settled in various northern cities during this Great Migration, though New York City was the most popular, particularly the district of Harlem. It was, in the words of editor, journalist, and critic Alain Locke, “a spiritual coming of age” for African American artists and thinkers, who seized upon their “first chances for group expression and self-determination”. Locke said that this move was a “deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern”.

With the end of the Civil War in 1865, hundreds of thousands of African Americans newly freed from the yoke of slavery in the South began to dream of fuller participation in American society, including political empowerment, equal economic opportunity, and economic and cultural self-determination.

Unfortunately, by the late 1870s, that dream was largely dead, as white supremacy was quickly restored to the Reconstruction South. The oppressive poverty and racism in the South was a big motivator for the Great Migration. Wages for black workers were between seventy-five cents on farms to \$1.75 in southern cities. By contrast, the average wage for unskilled work in the North ranged from \$3 to \$8 per day. Living conditions for black people in the south were terrible; sharecroppers were housed often in the cabins left standing from the time of slavery. While a small number of African Americans were able to become landowners, most were exploited as sharecroppers, a system designed to keep them poor and powerless. Sharecroppers paid the rent for the land they farmed by giving a share of the crops to the owner but they almost never raised enough to cover what they owed and soon accumulated debts beyond what they could ever pay. Therefore they were bound to land that they did not and could not own. Most Southern rural communities had no secondary schools for black children and at primary schools they were taught how to plant and harvest crops rather than an academic curriculum.

Mob violence against black people continued to rise and between 1885 and 1918 there were almost 3,000 lynchings. Hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) perpetrated lynchings and conducted campaigns of terror and intimidation to keep African Americans from voting or exercising other fundamental rights. After the Supreme Court agreed that black and white people could be “separate but equal”, white lawmakers on state and local levels passed strict racial segregation laws known as “Jim Crow laws” that made African Americans second-class citizens, leading to segregation where the facilities for black people were never equal to those reserved for white people. To make matters worse, floods devastated the South in 1915 and weevils infested and destroyed crops. As the Great War required more and more workers and had cut off immigration from Europe, Northern employers sought out black labourers in the South. In the North there were better wages, public schools and less violence and so many moved from the South to work. By 1920, some 300,000 African Americans from the South had moved north, and Harlem was one of the most popular destinations for these families.

The Great Migration and Great War Knowledge Check: MCQs

a) The Great Migration was a time when...

1. There wasn't enough work in the South
2. Black workers and their families migrated to the North
3. The Great War caused poverty and segregation
4. There were many migrants from Europe, causing unemployment

b) Sharecropping meant that black farmers...

1. Shared the crops they grew with their families and the community
2. Used crops that were eventually destroyed in floods and infestations of weevils
3. Had to give a share of their crops to the owner of their land so they were never able to own their own land
4. Were paid \$8 a day in the North, compared to pitiful wages in the South

c) The First World War meant that...

1. Northern employers recruited black labourers from the South
2. Wealth from America was spread across people
3. There was an increase in equality and fairness across the South
4. Mob violence decreased drastically

d) "Jim Crow" laws were based on the principal of "separate but equal" but enabled and encouraged...

1. Separation of powers
2. Segregation, injustice and racism
3. Economic opportunity for sharecroppers
4. Autonomy for all Americans

Harlem

The New York City neighbourhood, encompassing only three square miles, teemed with black artists, intellectuals, writers, and musicians. Harlem drew nearly 175,000 African Americans and became a destination for African Americans of all backgrounds. From unskilled labourers to an educated middle-class, they shared common experiences of slavery, emancipation, and racial oppression, as well as a determination to forge a new identity as free people. African Americans of all social classes joined together in Harlem, which became the focal point of a growing interest in African American culture: jazz, blues, dance, theatre, art, fiction, and poetry. Black-owned businesses, from newspapers, publishing houses, and music companies to nightclubs, cabarets, and theatres, helped fuel the neighbourhood's thriving scene. Some of the era's most important literary and artistic figures migrated to or passed through Harlem, helping to define a period in which African American artists reclaimed their identity and pride in defiance of widespread prejudice, racism and discrimination.

Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance reflected a diversity of forms and subjects. Some poets, such as Claude McKay, used culturally European forms—the sonnet was one—melded with a radical message of resistance, as in "If We Must Die." Others, including James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes, brought specifically black cultural creations into their work, infusing their poems with the rhythms of ragtime, jazz, and blues.

The considerable population shift resulted in a Black Pride movement with leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois working to ensure that black Americans got the credit they deserved for cultural areas of life. There were many magazines and publications that were started during the Harlem Renaissance to promote the writing of the time. Novelist Jessi Redmond Fauset's 1924 novel *There Is Confusion* explored the idea of black Americans finding a cultural identity in a white-dominated Manhattan. Fauset was literary editor of the NAACP magazine *The Crisis* and developed a magazine for black children with W. E. B. Du Bois. *FIRE!!*, edited by Walter Thurman, made a big impact on the literary scene even though there was only one issue published due to financial difficulties and the office burning down. Sociologist Charles Spurgeon Johnson used the debut party for *There Is Confusion* to organize resources to create *Opportunity*, the National Urban League magazine he founded and edited, a success that bolstered writers like Langston Hughes. Hughes was at that party along with other promising black writers and editors, as well as powerful white New York publishing figures. Soon, many writers found their work appearing in mainstream magazines like Harper's.

Harlem Knowledge Check: MCQs

a) Although Harlem was only three square miles in New York City,...

1. It was overcrowded and overwhelmed by inhabitants
2. It contained few artists and poets
3. It was only accessible to the rich or middle class
4. It contained many black artists, musicians and poets

b) Magazines and publications that started during the Harlem Renaissance promoted...

1. Jazz and blues music
2. The work of black writers
3. Poetry
4. Only political groups such as the National Urban League

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868 – 1963)

W.E.B. Du Bois was an American sociologist, historian, author, editor, and activist who was the most important black protest leader in the United States during the first half of the 20th century. He shared in the creation of the NAACP and his work transformed the way that the lives of black citizens were seen in American society. As editor of the magazine *The Crisis*, he supported many writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Du Bois frequently promoted African-American artistic creativity in his own writings, and when the Harlem Renaissance emerged in the mid-1920s, he celebrated the end of the long absence of black artists from creative work. However, his enthusiasm for the Harlem Renaissance began to decrease as he came to believe that many white people visited Harlem for out of curiosity, fascination and exploitation, not for genuine appreciation of black art. Du Bois insisted that artists recognize their moral responsibilities, writing that "a black artist is first of all a *black* artist." He was also concerned that black artists were not using their art to promote black causes, saying "I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda."

Originally published in 1904 in *the Independent*, Du Bois' prose poem "Credo" was written before the Harlem Renaissance and proclaimed his philosophy of racial equality and remains one of his most famous and most influential works.

W.E.B Du Bois Knowledge Check: MCQs	
<p>a) W.E. Du Bois was the editor of...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the newspaper <i>The Crisis</i>, which published the work of journalists 2. the book <i>The Crisis</i>, which published short stories 3. the magazine <i>The Crisis</i>, which published black writers' work 	<p>b) Although Du Bois celebrated the promotion of black artists and writers in the Harlem Renaissance, he became worried that...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. white audiences were overpopulating Harlem, pushing out black artists 2. the work's popularity with white audiences was not because of a genuine appreciation of the art 3. white audiences that were visiting Harlem were taking the ideas of writers of the Harlem Renaissance
<p>c) W.E. Du Bois believed that black artists must...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. use their art to promote black causes – they must use their art as propaganda 2. not use their art as propaganda, instead using their art to express themselves freely 3. use their art of avoid their moral responsibilities 	<p>d) Du Bois' prose poem "Credo"...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. was written at the height of the Harlem Renaissance and shows his politics 2. was written before the Harlem Renaissance and shows his commitment to equality 3. was written because he was influenced by writers of the Harlem Renaissance

Credo, W. E. B. Du Bois

1904

1. I believe in God who made of one blood all races that dwell on earth. I believe that all men, black and white, are brothers, varying through Time and Opportunity, in form and gift and feature, but differing in no essential particular, and alike in soul and in the possibility of infinite development.
2. Especially do I believe in the Negro Race; in the beauty of its genius, the sweetness of its soul, and its strength in that meekness which shall yet inherit this turbulent earth.
3. I believe in pride of race and lineage and self; in pride of self so deep as to scorn injustice to other selves; in pride of lineage so great as to despise no man's father, knowing that men may be brothers in Christ, even though they be not brother-in-law.
4. I believe in Service—humble reverent service, from the blackening of boots to the whitening of souls; for Work is Heaven, Idleness is Hell, and Wage is the “Well done!” of the Master who summoned all them that labor and are heavy laden, making no distinction between the black sweating cotton-hands of Georgia and the First Families of Virginia, since all distinction not based on deed is devilish and not divine.
5. I believe in the Devil and his angels, who wantonly work to narrow the opportunity of struggling human beings, especially if they be black; who spit in the faces of the fallen, strike them that cannot strike again, believe the worst and work to prove it, hating the image which their Maker stamped on a brother's soul.
6. I believe in the Prince of Peace. I believe that War is Murder. I believe that armies and navies are at bottom the tinsel and braggadocio of oppression and wrong; and I believe that the wicked conquest of weaker and darker nations by nations whiter and stronger but foreshadows the death of that strength.
7. I believe in Liberty for all men; the space to stretch their arms and their souls; the right to breathe and the right to vote, the freedom to choose their friends, enjoy the sunshine and ride on the railroads, uncursed by colour; thinking, dreaming, working as they will in the kingdom of God and love.
8. I believe in the training of children, black even as white; the leading out of little souls into the green pastures and beside the still waters, not for pelf or peace, but for Life lit by some large vision of beauty and goodness and truth.
9. Finally, I believe in Patience—patience with the weakness of the Weak and the strength of the Strong, the prejudice of the Ignorant and the ignorance of the Blind; patience with the tardy triumph of Joy and the mad chastening of Sorrow—patience with God.

Claude McKay (1889 – 1948)

Festus Claudius "Claude" McKay was a Jamaican writer and poet, and was a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance. His 1922 poetry collection, *Harlem Shadows*, was among the first books published during the Harlem Renaissance. The poems we will study were featured in this collection and were originally published in Harlem magazines beforehand.

The son of peasant farmers, McKay was infused with pride in his African heritage and became fascinated by English poetry. At age 17, McKay departed from Sunny Ville, Jamaica to apprentice as a woodworker in Brown's Town. But he studied there only briefly before leaving to work as a constable in the Jamaican capital, Kingston. In Kingston he experienced and encountered extensive racism unlike in his native Sunny Ville, which was predominantly black. Once back in Sunny Ville, he published poetry collections, received an award and used the money to finance a trip to America, and in 1912, he arrived in South Carolina to study. In 1914 he left school entirely for New York City and worked various jobs. As in Kingston, McKay encountered racism in New York City, and this compelled him to continue writing poetry.

In 1919, McKay befriended Max Eastman, editor of the magazine *Liberator* and published the inspirational "If We Must Die," which defended Black rights and threatened retaliation for prejudice and abuse. In *Black Poets of the United States*, Jean Wagner noted that "If We Must Die" transcends specifics of race and is widely prized as an inspiration to persecuted people throughout the world. "Along with the will to resistance of black Americans that it expresses," Wagner wrote, "it voices also the will of oppressed people of every age who, whatever their race and wherever their region, are fighting with their backs against the wall to win their freedom."

Upon publication of "If We Must Die" McKay commenced two years of travel and work abroad. He spent 1919 in Holland, Belgium and London. McKay returned to the United States in 1921 emerged as the first and most militant voice of the Harlem Renaissance. After 1922, McKay lived in the Soviet Union, France, Spain, and Morocco. Throughout his life, he advocated full civil liberties and racial solidarity. In 1940 he became a U.S. citizen; in 1942 he was converted to Roman Catholicism and worked with a Catholic youth organization until his death. McKay has been recognized for his intense commitment to expressing the challenges faced by Black Americans and admired for devoting his art and life to social protest, and his audience continues to expand.

Claude McKay Knowledge Check: MCQs	
<p>a) Although his childhood was relatively free of racism, when...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">McKay moved to Kingston and then to New York, his experience of racism inspired his writingMcKay returned to Sunny Ville in Jamaica, he experience racism for the first time	<p>b) Although <i>If I Die</i> was written to defend black rights,...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">it was popular in 1918 with audiences of all racesit has since become an inspiration to all persecuted people across the world

3. McKay moved throughout Europe, he experienced freedom from racist stereotypes

3. it has been used many times since in speeches about a variety of political issues

If We Must Die, Claude McKay

1919

1. If we must die, let it not be like hogs
2. Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
3. While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
4. Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
5. If we must die, O let us nobly die,
6. So that our precious blood may not be shed
7. In vain; then even the monsters we defy
8. Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
9. Kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
10. Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
11. And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
12. What though before us lies the open grave?
13. Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
14. Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

America, Claude McKay

1921

1. Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
2. And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
3. Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
4. I love this cultured hell that tests my youth.
5. Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
6. Giving me strength erect against her hate,
7. Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.
8. Yet, as a rebel fronts a king in state,
9. I stand within her walls with not a shred
10. Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.
11. Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,
12. And see her might and granite wonders there,
13. Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,
14. Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.

The Tropics in New York, Claude McKay

1922

1. Bananas ripe and green, and ginger root
2. Cocoa in pods and alligator pears,
3. And tangerines and mangoes and grape fruit,
4. Fit for the highest prize at parish fairs,

5. Sat in the window, bringing memories
6. of fruit-trees laden by low-singing rills,
7. And dewy dawns, and mystical skies
8. In benediction over nun-like hills.

9. My eyes grow dim, and I could no more gaze;
10. A wave of longing through my body swept,
11. And, hungry for the old, familiar ways
12. I turned aside and bowed my head and wept.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/video/77373/the-tropics-in-new-york>

Harlem Shadows, Claude McKay

1922

1. I hear the halting footsteps of a lass
2. In Negro Harlem when the night lets fall
3. Its veil. I see the shapes of girls who pass
4. To bend and barter at desire's call.
5. Ah, little dark girls who in slippered feet
6. Go prowling through the night from street to street!

7. Through the long night until the silver break
8. Of day the little gray feet know no rest;
9. Through the lone night until the last snow-flake
10. Has dropped from heaven upon the earth's white breast,
11. The dusky, half-clad girls of tired feet
12. Are trudging, thinly shod, from street to street.

13. Ah, stern harsh world, that in the wretched way
14. Of poverty, dishonor and disgrace,
15. Has pushed the timid little feet of clay,
16. The sacred brown feet of my fallen race!
17. Ah, heart of me, the weary, weary feet
18. In Harlem wandering from street to street.

A Long Way From Home, Claude McKay

1937

Chapter 9

Back in Harlem

Like fixed massed sentinels guarding the approaches to the great metropolis, again the pyramids of New York in their Egyptian majesty dazzled my sight like a miracle of might and took my breath like the banging music of Wagner assaulting one's spirit and rushing it skywards with the pride and power of an eagle.

The feeling of the dirty steerage passage across the Atlantic was swept away in the immense wonder of clean, vertical heaven-challenging lines, a glory to the grandeur of space.

Oh, I wished that it were possible to know New York in the that way only – as a masterpiece wrought for the illumination of the sight, a splendour lifting aloft and shedding its radiance like a searchlight, making one big and great with feeling. Oh, that I should never draw nearer to descend into its precipitous gorges, where visions are broken and shattered and one becomes one of a million, average, ordinary, insignificant.

At last the ship was moored and I came down to the pavement. Ellis Island: doctors peered in my eyes, officials scrutinised my passport, and the gates were thrown open.

The elevator swung me up to Harlem. At first I felt a little fear and trembling, like a stray hound scenting out new territory. But soon I was stirred by familiar voices and the shapes of houses and saloons, and I was inflated with confidence. A wave of thrills flooded the arteries of my being, and I felt as if I had undergone initiation as a member of my tribe. And I was happy. Yes, it was a rare sensation again to be just one black among many. It was good to be lost in the shadows of Harlem again. It was an adventure to loiter down Fifth and Lennox avenues and promenade along Seventh Avenue. Spareribs and corn pone, fried chicken and corn fritters and sweet potatoes were like honey to my palate.

Jean Toomer (1894 – 1967)

Jean Toomer was born in Washington, DC, the grandson of the first governor of African-American descent in the United States. A poet, playwright, and novelist, Toomer's most famous work, *Cane*, was published in 1923 and was hailed by critics for its literary experimentation and portrayal of African-American characters and culture.

As a child, Toomer attended both all-white and all-black segregated schools, and from early on in his life he resisted being classified by race, preferring to call himself simply American. A descendent of both white and black heritage, his father left his family when he was only one year old, leaving Toomer to be raised by his mother and grandfather.

After graduating from the highly regarded all-black Dunbar High School, Toomer began to travel extensively, attending college in New York, where he wrote and published many short stories, plays, and poems. In 1922, he moved to Sparta, Georgia to become a school principal. It was from this trip to the South that he began writing heavily about the African-American experience, eventually culminating with the publication of his most famous work, *Cane*, an experimental collection of stories and poems. It was hailed by critics and is seen as an important part of the Harlem Renaissance.

Cane is structured in three parts. The first is devoted to the black experience in the Southern farmland. The second part of *Cane* is more urban and concerned with Northern life. The conclusion of the work called Kabnis, where the character of Kabnis represents the Black writer whose difficulty in being an African-American prevents him from tapping the creative reservoir of the soul.

After the publication of *Cane*, Toomer continued to write prodigiously; however, most of his work was rejected by publishers. He became increasingly interested in the teachings of George I. Gurdjieff, a Greek spiritual philosopher, and turned to teaching Gurdjieff's beliefs in America. Finally, Toomer embraced the Quaker religion and lived his last decade as a recluse. Toomer stopped writing literary works in 1950 and died in 1967.

Jean Toomer Knowledge Check: MCQs	
<p>a) Although much of Toomer's writing is about the African American experience, Toomer...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. wrote <i>Cane</i> in 1923 to promote African American culture and characters2. refused to classify his own race, instead referring to himself as an American3. moved throughout Europe, experiencing freedom from racist stereotypes	<p>b) Despite the popularity and praise that surrounded <i>Cane</i>, Toomer...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. stopped writing poetry after its publication, becoming a recluse2. was rejected by other writers of the Harlem Renaissance3. had the work he did afterwards rejected by many publishers

Reapers, from *Cane* [Part 1] Jean Toomer

1923

1. Black reapers with the sound of steel on stones
2. Are sharpening scythes. I see them place the hones
3. In their hip-pockets as a thing that's done,
4. And start their silent swinging, one by one.
5. Black horses drive a mower through the weeds,
6. And there, a field rat, startled, squealing bleeds,
7. His belly close to ground. I see the blade,
8. Blood-stained, continue cutting weeds and shade.

November Cotton Flower, from *Cane* [Part 1] by Jean Toomer

1923

1. Boll-weevil's coming, and the winter's cold,
2. Made cotton-stalks look rusty, seasons old,
3. And cotton, scarce as any southern snow,
4. Was vanishing; the branch, so pinched and slow,
5. Failed in its function as the autumn rake;
6. Drouth fighting soil had caused the soil to take
7. All water from the streams; dead birds were found
8. In wells a hundred feet below the ground—
9. Such was the season when the flower bloomed.
10. Old folks were startled, and it soon assumed
11. Significance. Superstition saw
12. Something it had never seen before:
13. Brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear,
14. Beauty so sudden for that time of year.

Song of the Son, from *Cane* [Part 1] by Jean Toomer

1923

1. Pour O pour that parting soul in song,
2. pour it in the sawdust glow of night,
3. Into the velvet pine-smoke air to-night,
4. And let the valley carry it along.
5. And let the valley carry it along.

6. O land and soil, red soil and sweet-gum tree,
7. So scant of grass, so profligate of pines,
8. Now just before an epoch's sun declines
9. Thy son, in time, I have returned to thee,
10. Thy son, I have in time returned to thee.

11. In time, for though the sun is setting on
12. A song-lit race of slaves, it has not set;
13. Though late, O soil, it is not too late yet
14. To catch thy plaintive soul, leaving, soon gone,
15. Leaving, to catch thy plaintive soul soon gone.

16. Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums,
17. Squeezed, and bursting in the pine-wood air,
18. Passing, before they stripped the old tree bare
19. One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes

20. An everlasting song, a singing tree,
21. Caroling softly souls of slavery,
22. What they were, and what they are to me,
23. Caroling softly souls of slavery.

Beehive, from *Cane* [Part 2] by Jean Toomer

1923

1. Within this black hive to-night
2. There swarm a million bees;
3. Bees passing in and out the moon,
4. Bees escaping out the moon,
5. Bees returning through the moon,
6. Silver bees intently buzzing,
7. Silver honey dripping from the swarm of bees
8. Earth is a waxen cell of the world comb,
9. And I, a drone,
10. Lying on my back,
11. Lipping honey,
12. Getting drunk with silver honey,
13. Wish that I might fly out past the moon
14. And curl forever in some far-off farmyard flower.

Storm Ending, from *Cane* [Part 2] by Jean Toomer

1923

1. Thunder blossoms gorgeously above our heads,
2. Great, hollow, bell-like flowers,
3. Rumbling in the wind,
4. Stretching clappers to strike our ears ..
5. Full-lipped flowers
6. Bitten by the sun
7. Bleeding rain
8. Dripping rain like golden honey—
9. And the sweet earth flying from the thunder.

Prayer, from *Cane* [Part 2] by Jean Toomer

1923

1. My body is opaque to the soul.
2. Driven of the spirit, long have I sought to temper it unto the spirit's longing,
3. But my mind, too, is opaque to the soul.
4. A closed lid is my soul's flesh-eye.
5. O Spirits of whom my soul is but a little finger,
6. Direct it to the lid of its flesh-eye.
7. I am weak with much giving.
8. I am weak with the desire to give more.
9. (How strong a thing is the little finger!)
10. So weak that I have confused the body with the soul,
11. And the body with its little finger.
12. (How frail is the little finger.)
13. My voice could not carry to you did you dwell in stars,
14. O Spirits of whom my soul is but a little finger...
15. And the sweet earth flying from the thunder.

Countee Cullen (1903 – 1946)

When Countee Cullen’s (pronounced count-ay) paternal grandmother and guardian died in 1918, the 15-year-old was taken into the home of the Reverend Frederick A. Cullen, the pastor of Salem Methodist Episcopal Church, Harlem’s largest congregation. There the young Countee entered the center of black politics and culture in the United States and acquired both the name and awareness of the influential clergyman who was later elected president of the Harlem chapter of the NAACP.

While Cullen was shaped by his exposure to black ideas and yearnings, his formal education came from almost totally white influences. This heavily influenced his creative work and his criticism, particularly because he did extremely well at the white-dominated institutions he attended and won the approval of white academia. In high school Cullen earned academic honors that in turn garnered him the posts of vice-president of his class and editor of the school newspaper, as well as prizes for poetry and oratory. His glory continued at New York University, where won number of poetry contests. After the publication of *Color* in 1925, Cullen published many other works that were all received with praise. In 1928, Cullen was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship to write poetry in France, and he married Nina Yolande DuBois, the daughter of W.E.B. DuBois, a man who for decades was the acknowledged leader of the African American intellectual community. Few social events in Harlem rivalled the magnitude of the latter event, and much of Harlem joined in the festivities that marked the joining of two of its most notable families. They were divorced in 1930.

Because of Cullen’s success in both black and white cultures, and because of his romantic temperament, his poetry often embraced both cultures. He came to believe that art transcended race and that it could be used as a vehicle to minimize the distance between black and white people. Although Cullen was cautious of any black writer’s work that threatened to erect rather than pull down barricades between the races, he was at the same time so offended by the racial injustice in America that his own best verse—indeed most of his verse—gave voice to racial protest.

Countee Cullen Knowledge Check: MCQs	
<p>a) Unlike many Harlem Renaissance writers, who moved North, Countee Cullen...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. was raised by his parents in Harlem, with strong connections to a large church2. moved from the South as part of the Great Migration3. was taken by Reverend Cullen and raised in Harlem	<p>b) Cullen both wanted to both ___ and ___</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. reduce the distance between races <i>and</i> express his outrage at injustice and racism2. fight against inequality and fight against racial injustice3. promote black artists and move forward in the Harlem Renaissance

To A Brown Boy, Countee Cullen

1923

1. That brown girl's swagger gives a twitch
2. To beauty like a Queen,
3. Lad, never damn your body's itch
4. When loveliness is seen.

5. For there is ample room for bliss
6. In pride in clean brown limbs,
7. And lips know better how to kiss
8. Than how to raise white hymns.

9. And when your body's death gives birth
10. To soil for spring to crown,
11. Men will not ask if that rare earth
12. Was white flesh once, or brown.

Heritage, Countee Cullen

1925

1. What is Africa to me:
2. Copper sun or scarlet sea,
3. Jungle star or jungle track,
4. Strong bronzed men, or regal black
5. Women from whose loins I sprang
6. When the birds of Eden sang?
7. One three centuries removed
8. From the scenes his fathers loved,
9. Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
10. What is Africa to me?

11. So I lie, who all day long
12. Want no sound except the song
13. Sung by wild barbaric birds
14. Goading massive jungle herds,
15. Juggernauts of flesh that pass
16. Trampling tall defiant grass
17. Where young forest lovers lie,
18. Plighting troth beneath the sky.
19. So I lie, who always hear,
20. Though I cram against my ear
21. Both my thumbs, and keep them there,
22. Great drums throbbing through the air.
23. So I lie, whose fount of pride,
24. Dear distress, and joy allied,
25. Is my somber flesh and skin,
26. With the dark blood dammed within
27. Like great pulsing tides of wine
28. That, I fear, must burst the fine
29. Channels of the chafing net
30. Where they surge and foam and fret.

31. Africa? A book one thumbs
32. Listlessly, till slumber comes.
33. Unremembered are her bats
34. Circling through the night, her cats
35. Crouching in the river reeds,
36. Stalking gentle flesh that feeds
37. By the river brink; no more
38. Does the bugle-throated roar
39. Cry that monarch claws have leapt
40. From the scabbards where they slept.
41. Silver snakes that once a year
42. Doff the lovely coats you wear,
43. Seek no covert in your fear
44. Lest a mortal eye should see;
45. What's your nakedness to me?
46. Here no leprous flowers rear
47. Fierce corollas in the air;
48. Here no bodies sleek and wet,
49. Dripping mingled rain and sweat,
50. Tread the savage measures of
51. Jungle boys and girls in love.
52. What is last year's snow to me,
53. Last year's anything? The tree
54. Budding yearly must forget
55. How its past arose or set--
56. Bough and blossom, flower, fruit,
57. Even what shy bird with mute
58. Wonder at her travail there,
59. Meekly labored in its hair.
60. One three centuries removed
61. From the scenes his fathers loved,
62. Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
63. What is Africa to me?

64. So I lie, who find no peace
65. Night or day, no slight release

66. From the unremittent beat
67. Made by cruel padded feet
68. Walking through my body's street.
69. Up and down they go, and back,
70. Treading out a jungle track.
71. So I lie, who never quite
72. Safely sleep from rain at night--
73. I can never rest at all
74. When the rain begins to fall;
75. Like a soul gone mad with pain
76. I must match its weird refrain;
77. Ever must I twist and squirm,
78. Writhing like a baited worm,
79. While its primal measures drip
80. Through my body, crying, "Strip!
81. Doff this new exuberance.
82. Come and dance the Lover's Dance!"
83. In an old remembered way
84. Rain works on me night and day.

85. Quaint, outlandish heathen gods
86. Black men fashion out of rods,
87. Clay, and brittle bits of stone,
88. In a likeness like their own,
89. My conversion came high-priced;
90. I belong to Jesus Christ,
91. Preacher of humility;
92. Heathen gods are naught to me.

93. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
94. So I make an idle boast;
95. Jesus of the twice-turned cheek,
96. Lamb of God, although I speak
97. With my mouth thus, in my heart
98. Do I play a double part.
99. Ever at Thy glowing altar
100. Must my heart grow sick and falter,

101. Wishing He I served were black,
102. Thinking then it would not lack
103. Precedent of pain to guide it,
104. Let who would or might deride it;
105. Surely then this flesh would know
106. Yours had borne a kindred woe.
107. Lord, I fashion dark gods, too,
108. Daring even to give You
109. Dark despairing features where,
110. Crowned with dark rebellious hair,
111. Patience wavers just so much as
112. Mortal grief compels, while touches
113. Quick and hot, of anger, rise
114. To smitten cheek and weary eyes.
115. Lord, forgive me if my need
116. Sometimes shapes a human creed.

117. All day long and all night through,
118. One thing only must I do:
119. Quench my pride and cool my blood,
120. Lest I perish in the flood.
121. Lest a hidden ember set
122. Timber that I thought was wet
123. Burning like the dryest flax,
124. Melting like the merest wax,
125. Lest the grave restore its dead.
126. Not yet has my heart or head
127. In the least way realized
128. They and I are civilized.

Thoughts in a Zoo, Countee Cullen

1926

1. They in their cruel traps, and we in ours,
2. Survey each other's rage, and pass the hours
3. Commiserating each the other's woe,
4. To mitigate his own pain's fiery glow.
5. Man could but little proffer in exchange
6. Save that his cages have a larger range.
7. That lion with his lordly, untamed heart
8. Has in some man his human counterpart,
9. Some lofty soul in dreams and visions wrapped,
10. But in the stifling flesh securely trapped.
11. Gaunt eagle whose raw pinions stain the bars
12. That prison you, so men cry for the stars!
13. Some delve down like the mole far underground,
14. (Their nature is to burrow, not to bound),
15. Some, like the snake, with changeless slothful eye,
16. Stir not, but sleep and smoulder where they lie.
17. Who is most wretched, these caged ones, or we,
18. Caught in a vastness beyond our sight to see?

From the Dark Tower, Countee Cullen

1927

1. We shall not always plant while others reap
2. The golden increment of bursting fruit,
3. Not always countenance, abject and mute,
4. That lesser men should hold their brothers cheap;
5. Not everlastingly while others sleep
6. Shall we beguile their limbs with mellow flute,
7. Not always bend to some more subtle brute;
8. We were not made to eternally weep.

9. The night whose sable breast relieves the stark,
10. White stars is no less lovely being dark,
11. And there are buds that cannot bloom at all
12. In light, but crumple, piteous, and fall;
13. So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds,
14. And wait, and tend our agonizing seeds.

