

Literature of the Harlem Renaissance

If We Must Die

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

—Claude McKay, 1919

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've known rivers:
 I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than
 the flow of human blood in human veins.
 My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
 I bathed in the Euphrates [River] when dawns were young.
 I built my hut near the Congo [River] and it lulled me
 to sleep.
 I looked upon the Nile [River] and raised the pyramids
 above it.
 I heard the singing of the Mississippi [River] when Abe
 Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its
 muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
 Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

—Langston Hughes, 1920

Excerpt from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

To Janie's strange eyes, everything in the Everglades was big and new. Big Lake Okechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything. Weeds that did well to grow waist high up the state were eight and often ten feet tall down there. Ground so rich that everything went wild. Volunteer cane just taking the place. Dirt roads so rich and black that a half mile of it would have fertilized a Kansas wheat field. Wild cane on either side of the road hiding the rest of the world. . . .

"Whut we gointuh do round heah?"

"All day Ah'm pickin' beans. All night Ah'm pickin' mah box [guitar] and rollin' dice. Between de beans and de dice Ah can't lose. Ah'm gone right now tuh pick me uh job uh work wid de best man on de muck [in the Everglades]. Before the rest of 'em gits heah' . . ."

They rattled nine miles in a borrowed car to the quarters that squatted so close that only the dyke separated them from the great, sprawling Okechobee. Janie fussed around the shack making a home while Tea

Cake planted beans. After hours they fished. Every now and then they'd run across a party of Indians in their long, narrow dug-outs [canoes] calmly winning their living in the trackless ways of the 'Glades. Finally the beans were in. Nothing much to do but wait to pick them. Tea Cake picked his box a great deal for Janie, but he still didn't have enough to do. . . .

Day by day now, the hordes of workers poured in. . . . They came in wagons from way up in Georgia and they came in truck loads from east, west, north and south. Permanent transients with no attachments and tired looking men with their families and dogs in flivvers [cheap, old cars]. All night, all day, hurrying in to pick beans. Skillets, beds, patched up spare inner tubes all hanging and dangling from the ancient cars on the outside and hopeful humanity, herded and hovered on the inside, chugging on to the muck. People ugly from ignorance and broken from being poor.

—Zora Neale Hurston, 1937

Name: _____

Examining Works from the Harlem Renaissance

Review all three pieces of literature, visual art, or music from the Harlem Renaissance. Then categorize each piece into one of the following themes: (1) African Heritage; (2) Black Southern Folk Traditions; or (3) New African American Voice in the Twentieth Century. Record your answers and explanations in the chart.

Literature of the Harlem Renaissance

Title:	Title:	Title:
Author:	Author:	Author:
Theme:	Theme:	Theme:
Why?	Why?	Why?

Visual Art of the Harlem Renaissance

Title:	Title:	Title:
Artist:	Artist:	Artist:
Theme:	Theme:	Theme:
Why?	Why?	Why?

Music of the Harlem Renaissance (YouTube)

Title: "Backwater Blues"	Title: "Hotter Than That"	Title: "East St. Louis Toodle-oo"
Musician: Bessie Smith	Musician: Louis Armstrong	Musician: Duke Ellington
Theme:	Theme:	Theme:
Why?	Why?	Why?