Culture in Motion

Trace how creative work traveled from Harlem into 1920s culture

SS24.US2.3b "Explain how art, literature, and music, including that produced by Alabamians, influenced both the Harlem Renaissance and the broader culture of the 1920s."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each example of art, literature, or music, then circle the words that show how it influenced the Harlem Renaissance or reached people beyond Harlem. Number the examples 1, 2, and 3 so you can compare their paths.

From Harlem to a Wider Audience

(1) A book could carry the Harlem Renaissance far beyond a New York neighborhood. In 1927, artist Aaron Douglas illustrated *God's Trombones*, James Weldon Johnson's book of poems modeled on Black sermons. Douglas used bold silhouettes and geometric shapes to give the poems a striking visual style. His art helped present Black religious traditions as subjects worthy of modern art, a central aim of the Harlem Renaissance. Because the images appeared in a published book, readers who never visited Harlem could encounter that vision. Art on a page could shape how people elsewhere saw Black culture.

(2) Literature also brought voices from outside Harlem into the movement. Zora Neale Hurston was born in Alabama and grew up in Florida. Her short story "Spunk" appeared in *Opportunity* magazine in 1925. Its rural Black characters and their speech brought Southern experiences to readers of a Harlem-era publication. That choice challenged the idea that Black life had only one setting or one way of speaking. *Opportunity*, published by the National Urban League, circulated beyond New York, so the story could reach readers outside Harlem as well as writers and artists within the movement.

(3) Music moved through a different route: live performance, sheet music, and records. W. C. Handy, born in Florence, Alabama, published "St. Louis Blues" in 1914. The song came before the Harlem Renaissance, but its blend of blues and popular song helped make blues sounds familiar to later musicians and audiences. In 1925, singer Bessie Smith recorded it with Louis Armstrong playing cornet. That record carried the blues to listeners who could not attend a Harlem performance. Together, these examples show how Black creators shaped a Harlem-centered movement while books, magazines, and recordings brought their work into the broader culture of the 1920s.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Aaron Douglas's illustrations support an aim of the Harlem Renaissance, and how could they reach people outside Harlem?

2. How did Hurston's “Spunk” bring a new perspective into the Harlem Renaissance and carry it beyond New York?

3. Why does the passage describe Handy's song as influential in the 1920s even though he published it in 1914?

4. Compare the ways Douglas's art and Smith's recording could influence the broader culture of the 1920s.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are writing a label for an exhibit about the 1920s. In one paragraph of 70 to 100 words, connect the work of both Alabama-born creators in the passage to the Harlem Renaissance and explain how each work could influence people beyond Harlem. Include one reason their paths to a wider audience differed.

ANSWER KEY

Culture in Motion

GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.3b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each example of art, literature, or music, then circle the words that show how it influenced the Harlem Renaissance or reached people beyond Harlem. Number the examples 1, 2, and 3 so you can compare their paths. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Aaron Douglas's illustrations support an aim of the Harlem Renaissance, and how could they reach people outside Harlem?	**His modern visual style presented Black religious traditions as subjects worthy of art. The published book let readers outside Harlem see his images.**
2	How did Hurston's "Spunk" bring a new perspective into the Harlem Renaissance and carry it beyond New York?	**Its rural Black characters and speech brought Southern experiences into a Harlem-era publication. Opportunity circulated beyond New York.**
3	Why does the passage describe Handy's song as influential in the 1920s even though he published it in 1914?	**The song helped make blues sounds familiar to later musicians and audiences, and Bessie Smith's 1925 recording brought it to more listeners.**
4	Compare the ways Douglas's art and Smith's recording could influence the broader culture of the 1920s.	**Douglas's images traveled in a published book, while Smith's blues performance traveled on a record. Both reached people who did not visit Harlem.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Alabama-born Zora Neale Hurston brought rural Southern voices into the Harlem Renaissance through her story "Spunk." Its appearance in *Opportunity* meant readers beyond New York could encounter those voices. W. C. Handy, also born in Alabama, helped make blues sounds familiar to musicians and audiences connected to the movement. His "St. Louis Blues" reached more listeners when Bessie Smith recorded it in 1925. Their paths differed because Hurston's story traveled through a magazine, while Handy's earlier song gained new listeners through a later recording.

Accept explanations that connect a creative choice to its influence on the movement and identify how publication or recording reached a wider audience. The open response should distinguish Handy's 1914 publication from the song's renewed reach through a 1925 recording.