Harlem Voices

Themes, genres, and language in the Harlem Renaissance

11.T.PM.1 "Demonstrate knowledge of dominant themes, genres, and verbal styles of literature from a particular time period."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline words or phrases that reveal major themes, circle each genre named, and number 1 to 3 beside examples of verbal style. Your marks should show how Harlem Renaissance writers used form and language to express their ideas.

Many Forms, Many Voices

1 During the 1920s, Harlem in New York City became a major center of Black artistic life. The Great Migration had brought many African Americans from the rural South to northern cities, carrying regional memories and new ambitions. Writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance explored racial pride, the pressure of discrimination, and the search for self-definition. Their work challenged stereotypes by presenting Black characters as complex thinkers, workers, artists, and neighbors. Rather than speaking with one voice, these writers debated how art could serve a changing community.

2 Poetry became a visible form of the movement. Langston Hughes often used blues rhythms, repetition, and everyday speech, bringing the sound of music and conversation onto the page. Other poets used formal patterns alongside modern subjects. Fiction, essays, and plays also flourished. In short stories and novels, writers could follow characters through jobs, apartments, family conflicts, and city streets. Essays argued about politics, art, and education. Each genre offered a different way to examine individual lives and shared social conditions for readers across the country at once.

3 Verbal style, or the distinctive way language sounds and moves, helped shape a work's meaning. Some Harlem Renaissance writers used dialect, the represented speech patterns of particular communities, while others chose polished standard English or experimental imagery. A speaker who repeats a phrase may create the pulse of a song. A sharply ironic sentence can expose a gap between American promises and lived reality. These choices did more than decorate a text. They helped authors claim cultural authority and show that Black experience contained many voices, forms, and perspectives.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Name two dominant themes of Harlem Renaissance literature from the first paragraph. Quote one phrase that supports either theme.

2. How does the passage distinguish what fiction can do from what essays can do?

3. What three verbal features did Langston Hughes often use, and what effect did they bring to his poetry?

4. According to the final paragraph, how can repetition and irony shape a reader's understanding of a work?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75- to 90-word fictional vignette set during the Harlem Renaissance. Develop racial pride, migration, or discrimination, and use at least two verbal style choices named in the passage, such as repetition, everyday speech, imagery, irony, dialect, or formal language.

ANSWER KEY

Harlem Voices

GRADE 11 · 11.T.PM.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline words or phrases that reveal major themes, circle each genre named, and number 1 to 3 beside examples of verbal style. Your marks should show how Harlem Renaissance writers used form and language to express their ideas. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Name two dominant themes of Harlem Renaissance literature from the first paragraph. Quote one phrase that supports either theme.	**Possible themes include racial pride, discrimination, and the search for self-definition. Supporting quote: "racial pride" or "the pressure of discrimination."**
2	How does the passage distinguish what fiction can do from what essays can do?	**Fiction can follow characters through details of their lives, such as jobs, homes, and conflicts. Essays argue about subjects such as politics, art, and education.**
3	What three verbal features did Langston Hughes often use, and what effect did they bring to his poetry?	**He used blues rhythms, repetition, and everyday speech. They brought the sound of music and conversation onto the page.**
4	According to the final paragraph, how can repetition and irony shape a reader's understanding of a work?	**Repetition can create the pulse of a song. Irony can expose the gap between American promises and lived reality.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At dawn, Mama opened the window above Lenox Avenue, and the street answered with horns, shoes, and a trumpet practicing three bright notes. “New York never sleeps,” she said. I laughed, then counted the coins from my shift. Back home, the landlord had called us poor before he learned our names. Here, I painted signs for Mr. Davis, who paid me fairly. Three bright notes rose again. Three bright notes said, Keep moving. I carried my sketchbook downstairs.

Accept accurate themes, genres, and style effects that are supported by the passage. For the vignette, accept varied original situations if the response is 75 to 90 words, develops an appropriate theme, and clearly uses at least two named style choices.