Culture on the Move

New media and African American creativity in the 1920s and 1930s

USH.C.4.1.E "Identify new forms of cultural expression (e.g., radio, Hollywood films, comic books), including the significant impact of African American culture as exhibited by the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three forms of media that reached large audiences. Circle two examples of African American creativity, then number one sentence that shows a barrier Black creators faced.

New Ways to Share Culture

1. In the 1920s, a family could hear music from a distant city without leaving its living room. Radio stations sent voices and songs across the country, and broadcasts helped make jazz familiar far beyond the neighborhoods where musicians played. At the same time, Hollywood films drew crowds into theaters. Silent films told stories through moving images and title cards; by the late 1920s, films with recorded sound added voices and music. In the 1930s, inexpensive comic books brought continuing adventures to newsstands. These media did more than entertain: they changed how quickly popular culture could travel.

2. Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City, became a center of African American cultural expression during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Writers, artists, and performers explored Black life, history, and identity while challenging racist portrayals. Poet Langston Hughes wrote in language shaped by everyday speech and blues rhythms. Jazz musicians also experimented with improvisation, creating melodies in the moment, and with syncopation, which shifts accents away from expected beats. Bandleader Duke Ellington performed at Harlem's Cotton Club, and radio broadcasts of his orchestra reached listeners who had never visited New York. The music's reach made African American innovation central to the Jazz Age.

3. New media did not guarantee fair treatment. Many Black performers faced segregation, even when white audiences enjoyed their work. The Cotton Club, for example, featured Black musicians but usually admitted white customers. Hollywood often gave Black actors limited roles or showed harmful stereotypes. A 1938 comic book introduced Superman, whose continuing adventures could reach readers at newsstands across the country. Together, radio, films, and comic books offered new ways to reach large audiences, but fame did not erase discrimination. The Harlem Renaissance and jazz show how African American creators reshaped American culture despite these barriers.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did radio extend the reach of an African American musician named in the passage?

2. How did Hollywood films and comic books each offer audiences a different way to experience stories?

3. Identify one form of expression associated with the Harlem Renaissance and one feature of jazz described in the passage.

4. What example shows that African American cultural influence did not bring equal treatment?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Create a 70 to 95 word label for a museum display called “Culture on the Move.” Choose one object to represent each of two media from the passage, explain what visitors could learn from the objects, and connect an African American creator or creative practice to both cultural influence and a barrier described in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Culture on the Move

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.4.1.E

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three forms of media that reached large audiences. Circle two examples of African American creativity, then number one sentence that shows a barrier Black creators faced. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did radio extend the reach of an African American musician named in the passage?	**Radio broadcasts brought Duke Ellington's orchestra to listeners who had never visited New York.**
2	How did Hollywood films and comic books each offer audiences a different way to experience stories?	**Hollywood films presented stories through moving images, later adding recorded sound. Comic books offered continuing adventures that readers could buy at newsstands.**
3	Identify one form of expression associated with the Harlem Renaissance and one feature of jazz described in the passage.	**Langston Hughes wrote poetry shaped by everyday speech and blues rhythms. Jazz musicians used improvisation or syncopation.**
4	What example shows that African American cultural influence did not bring equal treatment?	**Black musicians performed at the Cotton Club and reached radio listeners, but the club usually admitted white customers.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My display pairs a radio receiver with a Hollywood movie ticket. The receiver helps visitors imagine families hearing Duke Ellington's jazz broadcasts far from Harlem, where his orchestra performed. The ticket shows how films brought stories to theater audiences through moving images and, later, sound. Both objects show how culture could reach more people than before. Yet wider audiences did not mean equal treatment: Black musicians could be celebrated on radio while segregation kept many Black customers out of the Cotton Club.

Accept other passage-supported examples of Harlem Renaissance writing, jazz techniques, new media, and discrimination. For the museum label, check that both chosen objects represent media in the passage and that the response connects African American cultural influence with a documented barrier.