

## Unit 10

# RHYTHMS IN POETRY

*From the Beat of Blues to the Sounds  
of Everyday Speech*

### Authors and Works

#### Featured in the Video:

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (poem)

Langston Hughes, “The Weary Blues,” “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “Montage of a Dream Deferred” (poems)

William Carlos Williams, “To a Poor Old Woman,” “The Red Wheelbarrow,” “This Is Just to Say” (poems)

#### Discussed in This Unit:

Ezra Pound, “In a Station of the Metro,” *The Cantos* (poems)

Hilda Doolittle (H.D.), *The Walls Do Not Fall*, *Tribute to the Angels*, *The Flowering of the Rod* (long poems); *Pilate’s Wife*, *Asphodel*, *Her* (prose pieces)

Jean Toomer, *Cane* (novel containing both prose and poetry)

Genevieve Taggard, “Everyday Alchemy,” “With Child,” “At Last the Women Are Moving” (poems)

Carl Sandburg, “Chicago,” “Child of the Romans,” “Cool Tombs” (poems)

Robert Frost, “Mowing,” “Mending Wall,” “After Apple-Picking,” “Stopping by Woods,” “Birches,” “Out, Out—,” “Design,” “The Gift Outright” (poems)

Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” “The Lynching” (poems); *Home to Harlem* (novel)

### Overview Questions

■ How did World War I affect the way that Americans imagined themselves? How is this change reflected in the writings of the era?

■ How do the authors in Unit 10 question or affirm individual identity? How do race and gender complicate what it means to be an American?

■ How do these writers use the vernacular? How

does the idiom of Williams, for example, differ from that of Hughes?

■ How do these authors strive to broaden our concept of what it means to be American? How do they use different strategies to imagine and address marginalized peoples?

■ What qualities are common to all the writers in this unit?

■ How does the war affect the poetry of this period? How is this poetry also influenced by popular culture?

■ How do physical spaces influence this literature? How does the American city, specifically Harlem and Chicago, shape the production of American poetry of the 1920s and 1930s? What events changed the face of American cities in the 1920s and 1930s? How are those changes reflected in the poetry?

■ Does American literature have to be written within the borders of the United States? How do we categorize the literature of expatriate writers? Does poetry have to use an American idiom to be considered American?

■ How would you describe modernism, in contrast to other literary movements you have encountered or studied? What values and questions are reflected in the poetry of this movement?

■ How does the modernism of American poets writing in America differ from the modernism of those writing abroad? How do race and gender affect the way writers interpret modernism? What assumptions about literature have we inherited from the modernist poets? Can you see the modernist legacy in contemporary writers?

■ How do the African American authors in this unit re-imagine American identity? How do they challenge the way history has been told and recorded? What other myths about America are challenged by the poets in this unit?

■ How do the expatriate writers treat the ques-

tion of American identity? Why does Greek mythology play a recurring role in American modernist verse?

## Learning Objectives

After students have viewed the video, read the headnotes and literary selections in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, and explored related archival materials on the *American Passages* Web site, they should be able to

1. describe at least two different varieties of literary modernism and discuss how black and white modernist experiments may have influenced each other;
2. relate the historical and cultural developments and controversies of the time to poetry written between the world wars;
3. discuss how these authors imagine American identity;
4. analyze and compare basic poetic strategies such as the use of form, language, allusion, imagery, and rhythm in the poetry in this unit.

## Instructor Overview

The opening decades of the twentieth century seemed to prove what Henry Adams and other historians had suspected: that technological change and social turmoil were propelling the West into unimaginable new territory, and that established ways of describing the human condition—including literary modes and strategies—were no longer appropriate. In 1903, modern aviation was little more than slapstick experiments with powered gliders on an empty beach; a dozen years later, in the middle of World War I, there were fleets of long-range lethal fighters in the air over battlefields where more soldiers would die than in any conflict in human history. Immediately after the armistice a pandemic of influenza killed millions more in their hometowns, and major American cities ran out of coffins.

In the United States, which had been spared the immense devastation inflicted in the European the-

aters of war, an economic boom brought heady hopes. Energized by new war-related technology, a pent-up demand for consumer goods, and an imperative to rebuild devastated landscapes in Belgium, France, and Italy, American heavy industry went to full throttle, offering high-paying jobs and setting off a migration of adventurous Americans, white and black, from small towns in the South to big cities in the East and Midwest. At the same time, disappointment, competition for work and for living space, and cross-cultural encounters brought new turmoil and violence.

In the summer of 1919, dubbed the Red Summer, race riots and lynchings erupted in many cities across America. Despite the optimism so evident in the music, fashion, and popular culture of the 1920s, racial tensions continued to fester, and starry-eyed investing and spending created an economic bubble, which burst in 1929. In that year, a series of bank failures overseas and a crash of stock markets all over the world brought on the Great Depression, which lasted nearly a decade and affected every industrialized country in the world. The bleak economic times brought about a renewed political and social awareness, as writers like Carl Sandburg, William Inge, John Steinbeck, and Genevieve Taggard brought special attention to the plight of millions. By the end of the 1930s, the threat of a new war loomed, and the vibrant 1920s seemed a distant memory.

Even before World War I, the artistic and literary communities of the West were haunted by a sense that new times required new ways of seeing and thinking. In Paris, the artistic practice of “cubism” appealed to many as a fresh way of representing the speed, diversity, and fragmentation of ordinary life. In the middle of the war, in a place called the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, experiments with “dadaism” challenged the arts and the individual mind to break free from the kind of logic that had carried European civilization into a storm of violence. During and after the war, American poets, from the aristocratic T. S. Eliot to the young African American Langston Hughes, looked to such experimental art for guidance in expressing the pace of modernity. The modernist poets strove to reinvent the fundamentals of poetry, to answer Ezra Pound’s challenge to “make it new.” Influenced by visual art, primitivism, orientalism, and jazz, writers searched for a distinctly American idiom. What should a

modern American poetry sound like? What could white culture and African American culture learn from each other? How could American modernism become something unique and fundamentally different from British and European experiments?

The video for Unit 10 chronicles the different paths modernist poets took as they responded to the political, social, and economic changes shaping American life. As the video suggests, modernism was not a monolithic movement with one core idea and strategy. For modernist authors, the early twentieth century seemed to be a cultural and historical turning point. Their work is characterized by questions about objectivity and subjectivity, about conflicts between psychological or inward time and the relentless ticking of the mechanical and historical clock. They searched—often fruitlessly—for objective truth and a renewed sense of belonging in a secularized world, one without moral definition.

The prose and poetry they created offer very different strategies and aesthetic choices. T. S. Eliot, who spent most of his career abroad, ultimately turned to the high culture of the classical world and the European Renaissance. Committed to developing an American idiom, William Carlos Williams built poetry from everyday speech. Langston Hughes was also interested in creating music from the vernacular and the everyday, but he paid special attention to the dialects of African Americans. Determined to portray black experience with honesty and dignity, Hughes looked to jazz, folk tradition, and history as the foundations for his verse.

The video, archive, and curriculum in Unit 10 highlight early modernist intersections in America among art, politics, and culture. The key concepts covered include the Harlem Renaissance, orientalism, primitivism, the influence of radio, and the idea of the “New Negro.” The materials also suggest ways that students might relate the authors and works to one another. Other units that provide complements to this one include Unit 7, “Slavery and Freedom,” which offers background for the struggles and ideas explored by Harlem Renaissance writers; Unit 9, “Social Realism,” which explores the rise of a modern political and social conscience in America; and Unit 11, “Modernist Portraits,” and Unit 13, “Southern Renaissance,” which present other varieties of modernist writing between the world wars. Finally, Unit 15, “Poetry of Liberation,” and Unit 16, “Search for Identity,” illustrate the

legacy of poets first interested in portraying the American vernacular and the black experience. These later authors also reflect an interest in formal experimentation, the mixing of literary genres, the introduction of shocking subject matter, an exploration of states of mind (as opposed to an emphasis on narrative), and a fascination with the everyday.

## Student Overview

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Many of the writers of this period responded to the disruptions of modernity with an interest in “primitivism,” a renewed taste for traditional art from Africa, Asia, the South Pacific, and the indigenous peoples of North America. With its aesthetic surprises and its aura of exoticism, such art seemed to promise fresh ways of perceiving, as well as

escape from the excesses of civilization. Modernists expressed their sense of dislocation and alienation through fragmented form, and they looked to other cultures, particularly ancient civilizations and Asian traditions, as a respite from their urban, modern experience. Whatever their course, these poets recognized the dramatic changes introduced by modernity, from technology to urbanization, and they strove to write poetry that would respond to such change with fresh language. As they searched for this new poetic idiom, they raised questions central to their identity as Americans.

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## Video Overview

- **Authors covered:** T. S. Eliot, Langston Hughes, William Carlos Williams
- **Who’s interviewed:** Lisa Steinman, chair of the English department (Reed College); Pancho Savery, professor of English (Reed College); Jacqueline Dirks, associate professor of history and humanities (Reed College); Rafia Zafar, director of African and Afro-American studies (Washington University); and Alice Walker, author and poet
- **Points covered:**
  - Many American poets between the world wars favored common speech and strove to make their verse accessible to a large public. Others developed a style that could seem obscure.
  - The historical, cultural, and economic events that shaped poetry of this period included the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, World War I, and the Great Depression. In addition, rapidly advancing technology made possible department stores, skyscrapers, and public transportation; America was suddenly more urban than ever.
  - When Ezra Pound urged poets to “make it new” in 1912, he helped to launch modern poetry, which left behind traditional forms and style in favor of free verse and vivid language. Pound wanted poets to con-

centrate on language and rhythm, to bring poetry “closer to the condition of music.”

- Modernism was moving in two very different directions. While T. S. Eliot and Pound found inspiration and subjects in arcane traditions of classical and medieval Europe and Asia, William Carlos Williams and Langston Hughes looked to their own neighborhoods and personal experiences for inspiration, subjects, and styles. Hughes drew on African American culture, particularly the blues, jazz, and oral storytelling, to create poetry with distinctive rhythms and innovative use of the vernacular, a poetry meant to be heard. His poetry also reflects his social awareness and commitment to activism.
- In the 1920s, Harlem experienced a cultural and artistic flowering known as the Harlem Renaissance. While many African Americans took a great interest in the art and literature of the movement, white audiences were attracted to Harlem as well, to hear the music and experience the excitement of the popular culture.
- Alain Locke popularized the concept of the “New Negro,” asserting that African Americans could achieve greater acceptance and social equality through art. He also believed that African Americans

## Video Overview (continued)

could use art to define their identity and create a sense of racial pride and community.

- Williams and Pound were interested in the austere traditional poetry of China and Japan, in which ordinary objects can signify much beyond themselves.

### PREVIEW

- **Preview the video:** The video offers historical background for Unit 10, focusing particularly on the effects of the Great Migration, urbanization, the rapid technological change of ordinary life, and racial prejudice. Centering on Hughes, Williams, and Eliot, the film shows how different strands of modernism developed and influenced one another. While Eliot wrote much of his poetry abroad, Williams and Hughes remained on American soil, both imaginatively and in the flesh. Eliot's work reflects an interest in and respect for Western European tradition, and he wrote obscure, incantatory poetry for an elite audience. Williams and Hughes, however, strove to make their poetry accessible to a much broader reading public, and their inspiration came primarily from everyday experience. They used the American idiom, and they challenged conventional concepts of both America and American poetry. In addition, Hughes's poetry is politically charged, and he incorporated elements of African American culture and history in his work. Despite their differences, all three influenced generations of poets to come.

- **What to think about while watching:** What different kinds of modernism are discussed in the video? How do the featured authors, Williams, Eliot, and Hughes, differ from one another in aesthetic philosophy? How do these differences appear in their poetry? How did black and white modernism influence each other? What qualities are common to all the poetry?

What cultural, demographic, and technological forces were changing American life? The end of World War I and the threat of World War II affected all these poets at various times in their careers. The population distribution shifted dramatically in the early part of the century, and

technology was also rapidly changing the quality and pace of life. How did these changes influence art at the time?

- **Tying the video to the unit content:** Although the video focuses primarily on Williams, Eliot, and Hughes, it offers important historical background that brings the rest of the unit into focus. The portrayal of Harlem and the racial climate between the world wars connects the poetry of Cullen, McKay, and Brown, all of whom struggled with the problems of racial identity, equality, poetic tradition, and subject matter. Their political aims are shared in part by poets like Sandburg and Taggard, who are in tune with the struggles of working-class America. These poets all strive to represent lived experience honestly, and most of them rely on vernacular and dialect in their work. The effort to create an American identity was not limited to these poets. Indeed, Williams and Frost also did much to establish an American poetic identity by concentrating on American landscapes, language, and experience. Frost's wry, countrified New England narrative voice was often praised as a fundamental voice of America, and his determination to weave poetry out of everyday experience aligns him to some extent with Williams, who also looked to the ordinary for inspiration. Frost, however, was a lifelong believer in metaphor; Williams saw metaphor as a kind of dishonesty in art and strove for a poetry that could present ordinary experience unadorned and unmediated.

Other authors in the unit, H.D., Pound, and Eliot, represent another strand of modernism that relied much more on the tradition of Western Europe. Their status as expatriates and their interest in classical traditions set them apart from the other authors in Unit 10. As the unit suggests, their work influenced these other writers, convincing them that their American rhythms were all the more important. In addition, Pound's role as mentor and founder of the imagist movement affected many of the writers who chose to stay in the United States. His concept of poetry as something new, as grounded in the particular and ordinary, was central to the work of all these poets.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE VIDEO

|                                 | <b><i>What is an American? How does American literature create conceptions of the American experience and identity?</i></b>                      | <b><i>How do place and time shape literature and our understanding of it?</i></b>  | <b><i>What characteristics of a work have made it influential over time?</i></b>  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Compre-<br>hension<br>Questions | What sources did the poets in this unit draw on for inspiration?   | What kinds of historical and social events influenced art between the world wars? How did these forces shape poetry?   | What is imagism? What are the features of this movement? How did it influence other poets besides Pound and Eliot?  |
| Context<br>Questions            | What is the relationship between the two strands of modernism outlined in the video? How do they overlap?  | How did patronage by wealthy whites affect the African American artists in this unit? How did the Great Migration, which brought together black Americans from all over the country, lead to changes in the racial climate? How did those changes affect the poetry of the time? | What are the aesthetic differences between the two strands of modernism covered in this unit? How have changing race and class politics affected the reception of these aesthetic innovations by subsequent generations of writers? |
| Exploration<br>Questions        | How does William Carlos Williams's "This Is Just to Say" compare to Li Young Lee's "Eating Together"? What poetic strategies do the poems share? | What comparison can you make between William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" and other poems you have read this semester? What is distinctive about Williams's poem especially in terms of style and language?   | How can you define American poetry? What other American literary figures might have been influenced by Williams, Eliot, and Hughes? What characteristics of their work do you see being continued in American poetry today?         |

## TIMELINE

|       | Texts  | Contexts  |
|-------|--|---|
| 1910s | <p>Ezra Pound, "To Whistler, American" (1912), "In a Station of the Metro," "A Pact" (1913), <i>Cantos</i> (1917)</p> <p>Robert Frost, <i>A Boy's Will</i>, "Mowing" (1913), <i>North of Boston</i>, "After Apple-Picking" (1914), "Birches," "Out, Out—" (1916)</p> <p>William Carlos Williams, <i>The Tempers</i> (1913)</p> <p>H.D., "Oread" (1914), <i>Sea Garden</i>, "Mid-day" (1916), "Leda" (1919)</p> <p>Carl Sandburg, "Chicago" (1914), "Child of the Romans" (1916), "Cool Tombs" (1918)</p> <p>T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915)</p> <p>Claude McKay, <i>Harlem Shadows</i> (1918), "If We Must Die," "The Lynching" (1919)</p> <p>Genevieve Taggard, "Everyday Alchemy" (1919)</p>   | <p>The Great Migration begins, prompting over 4,800,000 African Americans to move from southern to northern cities (1900–60)</p> <p>First movie studio opens in Hollywood (1911)</p> <p>Igor Stravinsky's ballet <i>The Rite of Spring</i> is performed (1913)</p> <p>World War I begins in Europe (1914)</p> <p>Panama Canal opens (1914)</p> <p>D. W. Griffith's film <i>Birth of a Nation</i> opens (1915)</p> <p>The United States enters World War I (1917)</p> <p>World War I ends (1918)</p> <p>Prohibition begins, spurring an increase in illegal sales of alcohol (1919–33)</p> <p>"The Red Summer": race riots and the number of lynchings increase (1919)</p> |
| 1920s | <p>Ezra Pound, <i>Hugh Selwyn Mauberley: Life and Contacts</i> (1920)</p> <p>Claude McKay, "Tropics in New York," <i>Spring in New Hampshire</i> (1920), "Africa" (1921), <i>Home to Harlem</i> (1928), <i>Banjo</i> (1929)</p> <p>Langston Hughes, "Mexican Games," "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921), <i>The Weary Blues</i>, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," "Brass Spittoons" (1926), "Mulatto" (1927)</p> <p>H.D., "At Baia" (1921), "Fragment 113" (1922), "Helen" (1924)</p> <p>Genevieve Taggard, "With Child" (1921), <i>For Eager Lovers</i> (1922), <i>May Days</i> (1926)</p> <p>Robert Frost, "Design" (1922), "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (1923)</p> <p>T. S. Eliot, <i>The Waste Land</i> (1922), "The Hollow Men" (1925)</p> <p>William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow" (1923), <i>In the American Grain</i> (1925)</p> <p>Jean Toomer, <i>Cane</i> (1923)</p> | <p>Women gain the right to vote (1920)</p> <p>The Harlem Renaissance makes Harlem a spot for many artists and writers (1920–40)</p> <p>The Ku Klux Klan boasts a higher membership than ever (1921)</p> <p><i>Shuffle Along</i>, the first all-black musical, opens (1921)</p> <p>First talking picture, <i>The Jazz Singer</i>, opens (1927)</p> <p>First experimental television broadcast in the United States (1928)</p> <p>The Stock Market collapses, beginning the Great Depression (1929)</p>   |
| 1930s | <p>T. S. Eliot, "Ash Wednesday" (1930), <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i> (1935)</p> <p>Genevieve Taggard, <i>The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson</i> (1930), "At Last the Women Are Moving" (1935)</p> <p>Langston Hughes, "I Too" (1932)</p> <p>Jean Toomer, "The Blue Meridian" (1936)</p> <p>Robert Frost, "Two Tramps in Mud Time" (1936)</p>   | <p>Nation of Islam founded (1930)</p> <p>Technicolor introduces full color film (1930)</p> <p>Maiden flight of first multipassenger commercial airliner (1933)</p> <p>"The New Deal" is introduced (1933)</p> <p>Artists' Union founded (1934)</p> <p>World War II begins in Europe (1939)</p>  |

## TIMELINE (continued)

|       | Texts   | Contexts  |
|-------|---|---|
| 1940s | <p>Langston Hughes, "Ballad of Booker T" (1941), "Democracy," "Note on Commercial Theater" (1949)</p> <p>Robert Frost, "The Gift Outright" (1942)</p> <p>T. S. Eliot, <i>Four Quartets</i> (1943), <i>The Cocktail Party</i> (1949)</p> <p>William Carlos Williams, "The Dance," "Burning of the Christmas Greens" (1944), <i>Paterson</i> (1946)</p> <p>H.D., <i>The Walls Do Not Fall</i> (1944), <i>Tribute to the Angels</i> (1945), <i>The Flowering of the Rod</i> (1946)</p> | <p>Attack on Pearl Harbor brings the United States into World War II (1941)</p> <p>Atlantic Charter issued by Roosevelt and Winston Churchill (1941)</p> <p>Conference among Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin in Yalta (1945)</p> <p>The United States drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; World War II ends (1945)</p> <p>United Nations established (1945)</p> <p>Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) established (1947)</p> <p>Pan Am begins round-the-world commercial flights (1947)</p> <p>North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) established (1949)</p> |



## AUTHOR/TEXT REVIEW

### Robert Frost (1874–1963)



**[5873]** Dorothea Lange, *Napa Valley, CA. More Than Twenty-Five Years a Bindle-Stiff. Walks from the Mines to the Lumber Camps to the Farms* (1938), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-018799-E].

Although Robert Frost was born in San Francisco, where he spent his first eleven years, he is commonly associated with the rugged landscape and traditional values of rural New England. His father, William Frost, graduated with honors from Harvard and spent most of his life working as a journalist, but alcoholism led to an early death in 1885. In answer to William's wishes to be buried in Lawrence, Massachusetts, the family moved back east and settled in Lawrence. Robert quickly distinguished himself as both student and poet in high school, and he eventually married Elinor White, who with Frost was co-valetudinarian of their high school class. Frost attended Dartmouth for less than a year before dropping out to work odd jobs and write poems. Not finding the success he had hoped for, he decided in 1897 to return to college, this time attending Harvard as a special student. Although he didn't graduate from Harvard, he was influenced by many of the important thinkers in residence at the time, including George Santayana and William James. He left Harvard in 1899 and moved to a farm in Derry, New Hampshire. These early years of marriage were difficult financially for the Frosts, who had five children by 1905. Things began to look up when he accepted a position at Pinkerton Academy in 1906, where he spent five years teaching English, directing plays, and writing poetry.

In 1911, Frost sold his farm; he took his family to Scotland and London in the fall of 1912, a trip that proved invaluable to his writing career. Despite trouble getting his work published in America, Frost found a willing publisher in London, and *A Boy's Will* appeared in 1913. *North of Boston* followed in 1914. It was in London that Frost first met many of the leading young American poets, including Amy Lowell and Ezra Pound, who subsequently introduced Frost to Yeats, a poet he had long admired. The outbreak of World War I cut short Frost's time abroad and he returned to America in 1915. He had little trouble publishing his verse thereafter, and his growing reputation as a poet brought attractive offers at prestigious universities. He began teaching at Amherst in 1917. While he remained loyal to Amherst, Frost spent short periods at other institutions as poet in residence, and he lectured all over the United States. He eventually became an emissary to South America and later, during John F. Kennedy's presidency, to the Soviet Union. As the most famous poet of his time, Frost read at President Kennedy's inauguration.

Frost's poetry is widely recognized for its intense evocation of rural New England settings, its aphoristic lines, and its enigmatic voice—wise, clipped, and thematically evasive. Like other American modernists, Frost wrote in the American idiom, striving for colloquial language that evoked everyday speech. His poems usually have a narrative feel, and the characters are often engaged in manual labor, whether they are building a fence, picking apples, or chopping wood. Despite this penchant for the common and colloquial, Frost still believed very much in poetic form; he was famous for saying, in the

face of so much **free verse**, that writing without rhyme and meter was like playing tennis with the net down. For Frost much of the challenge and beauty in poetry comes from a tension between a dynamic, dangerous subject matter and the poise and restraint of literary form. Although Frost's poems often seem as simple and accessible as Sandburg's, his work reveals a darker underside, suggesting the complexity he sensed beneath the tranquil surfaces of New England country life. Frost's sagacious voice and gift for narrative lend his poems a popular appeal not shared by other modernists.

#### TEACHING TIP

■ While Frost's poems are wise and meditative, they almost always portray a narrator doing some sort of physical labor. Have the students write their own piece—either prose or poetry—in which they describe doing some sort of job. Then, ask them to reflect on the labor. How does this exercise help them understand the relationship between physical work and reflection? What is it about manual labor that seems to inspire Frost's writing? How does this connection to the land contribute to modern ideas about an American identity?

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** In "Mowing," Frost uses a form of whisper four times, but we never find out the secret. What is the effect of withholding the mystery from the reader? Does the narrator learn something we don't? What poetic form does Frost use? Why?

**Comprehension:** What does the wall symbolize in "Mending Wall"? Why does the neighbor repeat the cliché "Good fences make good neighbors," and how does the narrator interpret this? What season is it? Why do they have to repair the wall?

**Comprehension:** In "After Apple-Picking" why does the narrator refer repeatedly to sleep? How does the word change throughout the poem? What are the connotations of the word at the beginning of the work? Do they change at the end? What is the tone of this poem? Compare this poem to "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

**Comprehension:** In both "Birches" and "Out, Out—" Frost portrays a young boy. How do the portraits differ? What is the tone of each poem? What does he seem to say about youth in each poem? How is death figured in each work? What is the relationship between the Shakespearean title "Out, Out—" and the rest of the poem?

**Context:** In comparison to that of the other poets in this unit, Frost's work seems strangely removed from the modern world, where world wars erupted and technology marched on rapidly. What kind of change does Frost write about? How does he reflect change in his poetry?

**Exploration:** What does Frost have to say about the relationship between the land and its inhabitants in "The Gift Outright"? How does he portray history and American identity? How do his ideas

#### FROST WEB ARCHIVE

**[5873]** Dorothea Lange, *Napa Valley, CA. More Than Twenty-Five Years a Bindle-Stiff. Walks from the Mines to the Lumber Camps to the Farms* (1938), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-018799-E]. Transients, referred to as "hobos" or "bindle-stiffs," often traveled around the country by rail and on foot, working odd seasonal jobs such as harvesting crops or lumber. During the depression, the hobo became a character in American literature, particularly in works by Jack London, John Dos Passos, and Robert Frost. Poems and autobiographies by hobos themselves also flourished.

**[7111]** Samuel H. Gottscho, *Gate Bordered by Stone Walls* (c. 1918), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC2-4334]. This photograph shows a fence constructed in typical New England style: stone laid upon stone. In poems such as "Mending Wall," Robert Frost emphasized rural New England settings and used images like this to represent larger concepts.

**[8002]** Anonymous, *Robert Frost, Head-and-Shoulders Portrait, Facing Front* (between 1910 and 1920), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-115064]. Robert Frost is often thought of as a pastoral New England poet, but even his simplest-seeming poems engage complicated questions about life and death, good and evil.

**[9066]** Joseph John Kirkbride, *Panorama of Mooseriver Village* (c. 1884–91), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-61485]. "Good fences make good neighbors," Robert Frost tells us in "Mending Wall." Nineteenth-century writer Sarah Orne Jewett, the daughter of a country doctor, also drew much of her inspiration from the small-town New England life with which she was familiar.

**[9142]** William Shakespeare, from *Macbeth* (c. 1608), courtesy of Project Gutenberg. Macbeth's famous soliloquy from Act 5, scene 5 of *Macbeth*. Numerous works of American literature have drawn on this soliloquy, including William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Robert Frost's "Out, Out—."

about history and the land compare to those of other writers in the unit?

**Exploration:** Compare Frost's use of traditional poetic forms to that of Claude McKay. What does each gain by using these forms?

**Exploration:** Compare Frost's depiction of apple picking to the depictions of fruit picking in the prose of Steinbeck, Carlos Bulosan, and Helena Maria Viramontes (all in Unit 12). What does fruit mean for each?

**Exploration:** A spider serves as the central symbol in both Frost's poem "Design" and Jonathan Edwards's sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." What are the connotations of spiders? Why do spiders have particular resonance in a spiritual argument? How does the symbol function in each of these works?

### Carl Sandburg (1878–1967)

Carl Sandburg was born in Galesburg, Illinois, to parents who had emigrated from Sweden. His father was a hard-working blacksmith, but the young Sandburg didn't exhibit his father's enthusiasm for manual labor and a steady home life. Sandburg left school after the eighth

grade and then worked at a variety of odd jobs before volunteering in the Spanish American War in 1898. While serving in the war, he wrote columns about his experiences in the army for the Galesburg newspaper. After the war, Sandburg applied unsuccessfully to West Point. Eventually he attended Lombard College and worked at the local fire department to make ends meet. Although Sandburg became known around the institution for his writing, he didn't finish his degree, but instead spent the next decade traveling around the country, working odd jobs, including selling stereoscopic photographs. He also rode on the trains with hobos, an experience that explains his lifelong sympathy for the downtrodden. In 1904, he regained work at the Galesburg newspaper and also published his first collection of poems, *In Reckless Ecstasy*. Two years later he attended the fortieth anniversary of the Lincoln-Douglas debate in Galesburg, where he encountered the son of Abraham Lincoln. This

experience intensified his interest in the president. In later life he wrote a magisterial four-volume biography of Lincoln as well as a book about his wife, Mary Todd. For the next few years, he worked a variety of jobs, until returning to Chicago, where he again landed work as a journalist. In 1914, he published several poems in the prestigious *Poetry* magazine, and he quickly became famous.

A public favorite, Sandburg began touring the country giving readings and lectures, and he wrote in a variety of genres, publishing children's books, articles, the aforementioned biographies and an autobiography, as well as his poetry. But his poetic colleagues, such as



**[4848]** Jack Delano, *Blue Island, Illinois. Switching a Train with Diesel Switch Engine on the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad* (1943), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USW3-026606-E DLC].

Robert Frost and William Carlos Williams, considered Sandburg a poet with little craft. To an extent, they were right. Sandburg was more interested in subject matter than form or meter, and his poems often seem less polished. Despite what his contemporaries thought, Sandburg enjoyed wide public acclaim throughout his career. The governor of Illinois honored him by celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday as “Carl Sandburg Day,” the king of Sweden recognized him, the U.S. Congress invited him to give an address, schools were named after him in his home state, and President Johnson bestowed on him the Medal of Freedom in 1964.

Deeply influenced by Walt Whitman, Sandburg shared his predecessor’s devotion to American subject matter and common life. Sandburg strove to give poetic voice to a country whose poets seemed too willing to take a back seat to European tradition and to emulate Continental and other borrowed voices and forms. Based in Chicago, Sandburg was part of a school of poets who tried to wrest American poetry from the literary elite. Sandburg’s poetry was ultimately more political than either Whitman’s or William Carlos Williams’s, and his sharp journalistic eye made a frequent appearance in his verse. A political socialist, Sandburg saw his poetry as rooted in the **vernacular** and the experiences of the working class.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ Like Taggard and later Pound, Sandburg engaged with socialism. Have your students reread some of Taggard’s poems about working-class people. How do Sandburg’s poems reflect his political leanings? What themes and images associate him with socialism? How does his work differ from Taggard’s social critiques?

■ Like many modernists, Sandburg uses the symbol of the modern city in his work. Have your students take turns reading “Chicago” aloud. Ask them to critique each other’s performances, paying close attention to intonation, emphasis, and rhythm. How does reading the poem aloud help them to appreciate it on a deeper level? Are they now better able to answer more complicated questions like the following: How does Sandburg’s portrayal of the city differ from that of other modernists? How does his portrayal of the city seem uniquely American?

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** In “Chicago,” who is “they” in the section beginning in line 6? How does Sandburg portray Chicago? What is the effect of his use of personification? What is the tone of this poem?

**Context:** In “Child of the Romans,” who are the people in the train? How do they compare to the shovelman? Where do our sympathies lie? What is the significance of the title? How does this poem compare to “Chicago”? What are some of the themes that appear in both poems?

**Exploration:** As mentioned earlier, the city was an important symbol

#### SANDBURG WEB ARCHIVE

**[4501]** Anonymous, *Chicago, Looking North from State and Washington Streets* (1930), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. Some of Carl Sandburg’s best-known poems are about his home city, Chicago. Sandburg was at the vanguard of a literary movement that sought to bring poetry to the working class.

**[4848]** Jack Delano, *Blue Island, Illinois. Switching a Train with Diesel Switch Engine on the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad* (1943), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USW3-026606-E DLC]. The Chicago and Rock Island Rail Road Company was an important line that began operation in 1848. The 1930s saw the rise of a much lighter diesel engine that brought great innovations in both freight trains and streamlined “lightweight” passenger trains. Trains would come to symbolize both the hopefulness of modernism and the horrors of World War II.

**[6551]** Kenyon Cox, *Columbia & Cuba—Magazine Cover—Nude Study* (1898), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-68463]. An allegorical cover of an 1898 magazine, exemplifying the openness toward the human body of the late-nineteenth-century realists. The names of the women, “Columbia” and “Cuba,” refer to the imagined relationship of the nations during the Spanish American War.

**[7110]** H. C. White Co., *Making Link Sausages—Machines Stuff 10 Ft. per Second* (c. 1905), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-50217]. Photograph of Swift and Company’s Chicago packing house. Mechanization and urbanization encouraged some writers’ nostalgia for the United States’s agricultural past.

**[8000]** Al Ravenna, *Carl Sandburg, Head-and-Shoulders Portrait, Facing Left* (1955), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-115064]. Like William Carlos Williams, Carl Sandburg was deeply influenced by Walt Whitman. He shared Whitman’s love of common things and his devotion to Abraham Lincoln and American themes.



in modernist poetry. Compare Sandburg's portrayal of the modern city in "Chicago" with Eliot's portrayal of London in *The Waste Land*.

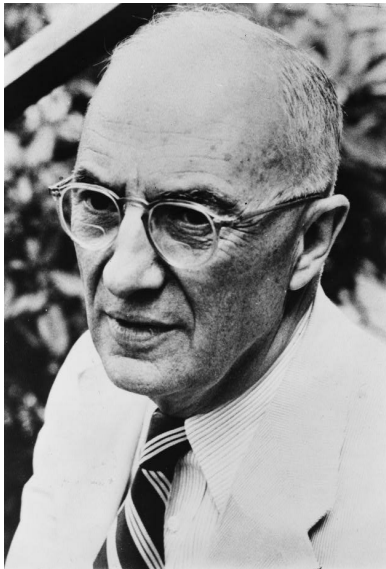
**Exploration:** For many American poets, it was difficult to write in the shadow of the long and rich literary traditions of older, more established cultures, particularly those of Europe and the Orient. Thus, part of creating an American poetic identity meant making American history and culture legitimate or revered. With a much shorter history and tradition, American poets often felt they had to work harder to establish themselves and their poetry. In addition, the melting pot culture made it difficult to create a collective American identity. How does Sandburg portray history in "Cool Tombs"? What is he saying about Lincoln, Grant, and Pocahontas? How does his idea of history differ from Hughes's in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"?

### **William Carlos Williams (1883–1963)**

Born in Rutherford, New Jersey, William Carlos Williams was the son of an English immigrant and a mother born in Puerto Rico. After studying in Switzerland and Paris, Williams returned to America permanently, and came to regard with disdain the vogue of expatriate life followed by so many other writers of his generation. In 1902, Williams entered the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, and he later completed his residency in New York City. A practicing physician, Williams often wrote poetry in his office between visits with patients, and his verse bears the mark of a physician's precise, careful, and relentless seeing. Living and working near New York, Williams knew H.D. and other artists and writers associated with Greenwich Village, Harlem, and New England, and he maintained a life-long friendship with many of them, although they often disagreed heartily among themselves about the missions and direction of modern poetry. Ezra Pound helped Williams publish his first collection of poetry, *The Tempers*, in 1913. Williams would go on to publish many books of poetry, short stories, novels, essays, and an autobiography, but it is his poetry that has assured his fame.

Williams represents a strand of **modernism** that is markedly different from the work of expatriate poets T. S. Eliot and Pound. Unlike his contemporaries, Williams wanted to write poetry that used the American idiom and focused on the world available to him in northern New Jersey. When he wrote about art, he wrote from the perspective of an ordinary visitor in the gallery, not as an insider flaunting a special aesthetic education. He affirmed that poetry should sound like common American speech and should not take the form that Pound came to favor; a verse littered with esoteric allusions. The painters he favored were those a bit like himself, artists who celebrated the color and feel of ordinary life.

Williams's poetry is deceptively simple, and his verse can often achieve an austerity and surprise that link him to symbolism, imagism, and experimentation with haiku. Many of his poems, including the famous and brief "The Red Wheelbarrow" observation, depend on



**[4996]** Anonymous, William Carlos Williams (1963), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-109601].

ingenious line breaks and visual organization for their poignancy. Williams's longest poem, *Paterson*, is an epic work that takes the industrial city of the title as its locale and chronicles the history of the people and place from its inception to the present. Williams draws on Joyce's circular structure in *Finnegans Wake* and echoes Eliot's use of the modern city in *The Waste Land*, but the specifically American diction and emphasis on the particular render it starkly original.

One of the most influential modern American poets, Williams received the Pulitzer Prize posthumously in 1963. His celebration of American colloquial speech and dedication to careful description are continued in the work of countless modern poets.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ Students may assume that Williams is an “easy” poet, especially in comparison to Eliot and Pound, who composed more allusive poetry. The challenge with Williams will be to show students that these poems are more complicated than they appear. “The Red Wheelbarrow” and “This Is Just to Say” provide good starting points because they seem so straightforward. While in a sense they are, it is important to discuss with students how the form of “The Red Wheelbarrow” complements the subject. The line breaks and carefully crafted stanzas (three words, then one word) control not only the cadence of the poem, but the eye and ear of the reader. Williams forces us to stop and consider each image separately, as if we are looking at a series of photographs or Chinese ideograms. Only at the end of the poem can we see the entire image. Writing the poems out in paragraph form can help emphasize the inventiveness of Williams's economy and line breaks. The concentration on everyday images and colloquial speech in all his poetry is also clearly illustrated in these works. You might then broaden discussion by exploring how these poems compare with some of the imagist works of Ezra Pound, H.D., and Amy Lowell.

■ It is also helpful to point out to students how Williams's modernism differs from that of Eliot and Pound. Like the expatriate poets, Williams wanted to remake poetry, to wrest it from what he considered the stale and outmoded Victorian verse. Williams felt it was necessary, however, to write uniquely American poetry, verse grounded in his native idiom, landscape, and culture. He did not look to Europe for a sense of tradition, but rather set out to begin a new direction, though he certainly took much from poets like Walt Whitman. Unlike Frost, whose poetry Williams felt continued many of the stereotypes of America as rural, agricultural, innocent, and basically moral, he saw America in a less positive light. Like Eliot and Pound, he often showed the darker, more corrupt side of modern America. While Frost, Eliot, and Pound often make judgments and pronouncements about culture and society in their work, Williams resisted speaking more generally about human nature or the modern condition. He preferred to let the reader draw his or her own conclusions. His famous saying “No ideas but in things” speaks to this belief that the poet should deal

## WILLIAMS WEB ARCHIVE

**[4996]** Anonymous, *William Carlos Williams* (1963), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-109601]. Drawing on such predecessors as Walt Whitman, poet William Carlos Williams sought to write in a distinctly “American” voice. In his efforts to capture the American idiom, Williams composed poems about such “trivial” things as plums and wheelbarrows.

**[5493]** Lewis W. Hine, *Paterson, New Jersey—Textiles* (1937), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. Apartment above the cafe of a retired silk worker living on an eighteen-dollar-a-month pension. Some modernist writers dealt with poverty, class, and social protest in their work. William Carlos Williams wrote a long poem called *Paterson*.

**[7128]** Anonymous, *Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio* (c. 1933), courtesy of the Library of Congress [HABS, ILL,16-OAKPA,5-2]. Photograph of entrance to Frank Lloyd Wright’s studio, looking southeast, near Chicago, an example of how Wright used orientalism in his architecture.

**[8950]** Pancho Savery, Interview: “Rhythms in Poetry” (2003), courtesy of American Passages. Professor of English Pancho Savery discusses William Carlos Williams’s relationship to American poetry.

with the concrete rather than the abstract. Like fellow poets H.D., Marianne Moore, and Ezra Pound, Williams probably saw Lawrence Binyon’s exhibition of Chinese art at the British Museum, 1910–12, and he was certainly struck by Pound’s use of Chinese poetics in “Cathay” (1915), about which he said that “the Chinese things” were “perhaps a few of the greatest poems ever written.”

## QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** Williams is interested in representing the traditions of everyday life. For him, the ordinary often takes on extraordinary overtones. In “Burning the Christmas Greens” Williams describes the ritual of incinerating the holiday tree and greenery. Why does this ritual seem so important to the speaker? What connections does he make between the burning and the bystanders in the last few stanzas? Why are the onlookers suddenly “lost” in the penultimate stanza?

**Context:** In his architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright employed the technique of *tokonama*, or the use of a permanent element as a focus for contemplation and ceremony. To what extent does Williams use this strategy in his poetry? What in the poems is equivalent to the hearth that serves as the focus for Wright’s architecture?

**Exploration:** “The Red Wheelbarrow” is one of Williams’s most famous poems. What is the relationship between form and subject matter? Why do you think it has gained such an important place in American poetry? How does it differ from work by Eliot and Pound? What do you think each of those authors would say about this poem?

## Ezra Pound (1885–1972)

Like T. S. Eliot, with whom he enjoyed a long friendship, Ezra Pound lived his early years in the United States but spent most of his life and career elsewhere. Born in Idaho, Pound spent his formative years on the East Coast. At sixteen, he attended the University of Pennsylvania and subsequently enrolled at Hamilton College. Eventually he returned to the University of Pennsylvania to study Romance languages and literature. After a year in Italy and Spain, Pound took a teaching job at Wabash College in Indiana, but soon left for a long sojourn in Europe.

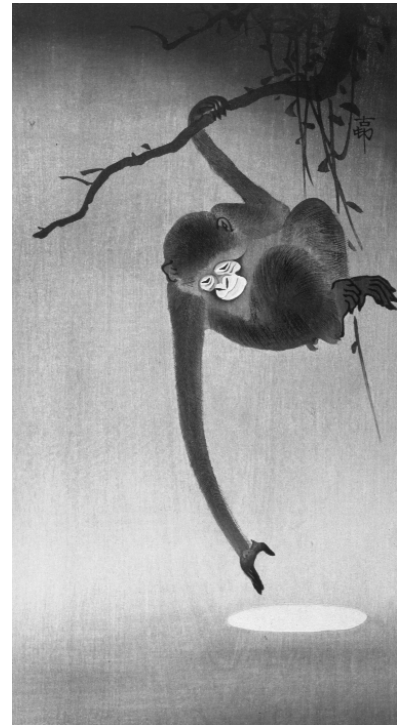
While Ezra Pound’s poetry remains important, his work as a mentor, editor, and theorist of literary modernism had a greater cultural impact. When Pound arrived in London, the literary scene seemed ripe for change. Cubism was shaking the art world; Stravinsky was composing radical music; T. E. Hulme was proclaiming the advent of literary voices that were powerful, new, and strange. In the years before the outbreak of World War I, Pound moved from one short-lived literary movement to another, sometimes as a leader, sometimes as an appropriator of ideas originated by others. Imagism and vorticism especially felt the impact of his presence, energy, and personality.

Intense, tightly focused, and borrowed from French experimentation at the close of the nineteenth century, imagism was supposed to spawn a new kind of European American poetry. In Pound's manifestos for the movement, imagism held to three principles: (1) "Direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective"; (2) "To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation"; (3) "As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome." When imagism came under the influence of Amy Lowell, Pound nicknamed the movement "Amygism," resenting the fact that her tastes and hard work had eclipsed his own. With artist and writer Wyndham Lewis's help, Pound became the center of vorticism, which set out to produce poetry characterized by greater intensity and vigor than the imagist verse in Lowell's *Poetry* magazine. Both of these schools attracted their share of aspiring poets, but they remained smaller currents of modernism.

The important and abiding contribution of these hectic prewar years was the restlessness they witnessed, a deep dissatisfaction with any art that continued languidly in old forms, anything that did not "make it new." As the slaughter of millions along the Somme River, at Tannenberg, and at Verdun fostered a doubt that anything of the Belle Époque culture was worth saving, Pound and other radical experimenters seemed prophetic in their recognition that an unimaginable new era required literary voices and forms that had not been seen before.

With the publication of the manuscript of Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, it has become clear just how significant Pound's influence was as an editor and arbiter of modernist taste. His editing of the poem was drastic and deft. Pound was also influential in the careers of the premier Irish modernist William Butler Yeats, the American imagist H.D., and many other modernists. Pound's most familiar poem is "In a Station of the Metro" (1916), his two-line haiku about people in the Paris subway. By his account, he worked for six months to achieve this poem, which began as more than thirty lines. Pound's most arcane and difficult works, *The Cantos*, are characterized by baffling shifts in time and perspective, abstruse allusions, and a cacophony of languages. He explained the nonlinear path of this modern epic as an attempt to emulate the Chinese ideogram, in which an image stands for a concept. At other times he suggested that the overall form was that of a fugue. Pound worked on *The Cantos* for most of his career, publishing the first in 1917. Although he never completed the project, he left a mass of stanzas which literary scholars have been decoding and annotating ever since.

Pound's later years were marked by unrest and conflict. In 1939, he visited the United States for the first time in twenty-nine years. Upon his return to Italy, he started speaking out against President Roosevelt on the radio, which continued as anti-Allied propaganda after World War II began. Eventually Pound's hatred of Jews and his enthusiasm for the Nazi agenda embarrassed even Mussolini. Indicted by the United States for treason against his country in 1943, Pound was arrested and imprisoned in Pisa when the Allied armies liberated Italy.



**[7119]** Shoshan, *Monkey Reaching for the Moon* (c. 1910), courtesy of the print collection of Connecticut College, New London.

#### POUND WEB ARCHIVE

**[4006]** Ernest Hemingway, *Letter, Ernest Hemingway to Archibald MacLeish discussing Ezra Pound's mental health and other literary matters*, 10 August (1943), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Archibald MacLeish Papers. The year this letter was written Pound was indicted for treason against the United States. He was brought to trial but was found mentally unstable and sent to a psychiatric hospital.

**[4981]** Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Portrait of Ezra Pound* (n.d.), courtesy of Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American Literature, and New Directions Publishing Corp. An influential poet himself, Ezra Pound also supported other writers. He was deeply interested in Chinese and Japanese poetry, and his own work stressed economy and precision.



**[4985]** Olga Rudge, *Ezra Pound with Gargoyles at Provence* (1923), courtesy of Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American Literature and New Directions Publishing Corp. Ezra Pound was born in Idaho but spent most of his life in Europe. Pound was charged with treason for broadcasting fascist propaganda to the United States during World War II, but the charges were dropped due to the efforts of a number of his fellow poets.

**[4997]** Janet Flanner-Solita Solano, *Group Portrait of American and European Artists and Performers in Paris* (1920), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Janet Flanner-Solita Solano Collection [LC-USZ62-113902]. Photograph of American and European artists in Paris, including Man Ray, Ezra Pound, and Martha Dennison. Many expatriate artists found inspiration in Paris's traditions and less restrictive culture.

**[4998]** *New York World-Telegram and Sun*, *Ezra Pound, Half-Length Portrait, Facing Front* (1943), courtesy of Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American Literature and New Directions Publishing Corp. In part because of the generosity he had shown them, many of Ezra Pound's contemporaries were very loyal to him. While imprisoned in a psychiatric hospital after being charged with treason against the United States, Pound wrote his *Pisan Cantos* and was awarded the Bollingen–Library of Congress Award.

**[7119]** Shoshan, *Monkey Reaching for the Moon* (c. 1910), courtesy of the print collection of Connecticut College, New London. Japanese print showing a monkey hanging from a tree. Asian art became increasingly popular in the early twentieth century. Many modernist poets used Japanese and Chinese themes.

**[8945]** Lisa M. Steinman, Interview: "Rhythms in Poetry" (2003), courtesy of American Passages. Professor of English and humanities Lisa M. Steinman discusses Ezra Pound.

In 1945 he was put on trial in Washington, D.C., saved from execution by means of an insanity plea, and incarcerated in St. Elizabeth's, a psychiatric hospital. In 1958, after vocal support from many American poets, including Robert Frost, Pound was released and allowed to return to Venice, where he lived until his death.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ It is helpful to note that Pound was an enthusiast about Chinese art and poetry. Have your students review the Core Context "Orientalism: Looking East."

■ Pound's later work is characterized by allusiveness, and it often proves obscure and difficult, particularly for first-time readers. Before asking your students to read "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," ask them to research some of the allusions. Have groups report on different references, including perhaps the story of Odysseus, the Greek gods, Ariel's role in *The Tempest*, and Elizabeth Siddal/Pre-Raphaelite painting. Then ask them to discuss allusiveness in poetry—its strengths and its limitations.

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** In "A Pact," what is Pound saying about his relationship to Whitman? What does he mean when he says, "I make a pact with you"? What is the tone of this poem? If Pound was so intent on creating a new kind of poetry, why does he invoke Whitman here?

**Context:** In "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," the narrator makes a timely reference to "kinema" (an early spelling of "cinema"), saying that "The 'age demanded' . . . a prose kinema" (lines 28–30). How might this poem be described as cinematic? How do you think the growing popularity of cinema in the 1920s and 1930s affected Pound's poetry?

**Context:** "Mauberley" also bears the burden of a war just fought. How does Pound portray World War I? What is his attitude toward it?

**Exploration:** Compare Williams's poems "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" and "The Dance" with Pound's "To Whistler, American." What differences do you notice? What techniques do the poets use to capture the visual art? Why do you think Williams chooses a Flemish artist, while Pound chooses an American? How do the poets use visual art differently?

#### T. S. Eliot (1888–1965)

Born in St. Louis, Thomas Stearns Eliot was one of seven children. Originally from New England, the Eliot family's lineage was bound to both religion and education. Eliot's grandfather, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, moved to St. Louis in 1834, where he began a Unitarian Church and founded Washington University, which became

one of the nation's elite educational institutions. Eliot's father was a successful business executive, but it was his mother, Charlotte Stearns, from whom he seems to have inherited his literary sensibility. She was a poet, and her biography of Eliot's grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, was published in 1904.

Although Eliot spent his formative early years in St. Louis, he maintained strong connections to New England, where the family summered following the aristocratic tradition of his ancestors. He graduated from Milton Academy, an elite private school in Massachusetts; and like many of his relatives, he then went to Harvard. Graduating in three years, Eliot stayed in Cambridge to study philosophy. While at Harvard, his most influential professors proved to be George Santayana and Irving Babbitt, who was vociferous in his dislike for lingering Romanticism and exhausted aesthetic traditions. As his poetry suggests, Eliot's formal education was intense and varied. He earned a master's degree from Harvard in 1910, the same year in which he wrote "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." He also studied at the Sorbonne in Paris and in Marburg, Germany, but when World War I exploded across northern Europe, he retreated to Oxford and London and never returned to America except as a visitor. Eliot read in an eclectic manner; to say the least, absorbing Dante, centuries of French poetry, and texts from Sanskrit. Eliot married his first wife, Vivien Haigh-Wood, on June 26, 1915, and it proved to be a turbulent marriage, ending in separation in 1932. Eliot's difficulties dealing with his wife's mental instability appear in subtle references in his poetry, most notably in Part II of *The Waste Land*.

In 1914, while in England, Eliot met Ezra Pound, who was to become one of the most influential figures in his life and career. It was Pound who first recognized Eliot's genius, proclaiming he "has actually trained himself and modernized himself on his own." Pound became Eliot's mentor and proponent, as he convinced editors to publish his work. Then as now, however, it was hard for anyone to make a decent living as a poet, so Eliot taught school for a while and eventually took a job as a clerk at Lloyd's Bank in London, where he worked while writing *The Waste Land* and other poems that made his reputation in the 1920s. The pressures of balancing a difficult marriage, Vivien's health problems, his father's death, and a developing writing career culminated in a mental breakdown in 1921. With most of *The Waste Land* completed, Eliot went to Lausanne, Switzerland, for rest and psychiatric treatment.

Pound helped Eliot edit *The Waste Land* extensively, reducing the poem by nearly half. Influenced by French poets like Laforgue, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud, and characterized by its fragmented form, esoteric allusions, spiritual searching, and apocalyptic imagery, *The Waste Land* stands as one of the most ambitious and innovative works of its time. In many ways the quintessential modernist text, this poem dispenses with linear sequence and narrative cohesion; complete with footnotes, it seemed to dare the reader to make sense of it. Although *The Waste Land* has become a centerpiece in survey courses



**[4995]** Barry Hyams, T. S. Eliot, Half-Length Portrait, Seated, Facing Slightly Right, Holding Eyeglasses (1954), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-109122].

of twentieth-century literature, in 1922 its voice and its themes seemed utterly new.

In the same year, Eliot started *Criterion*, a magazine that soon became an important voice on the literary scene. By the late 1920s, Eliot had established himself as a leading critic and arbiter of literary taste. His literary essays, including “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), proved almost as influential as his poetry in shaping what came to be called “High Modernism.”

*The Waste Land* marks a turning point in Eliot’s career because it seems to mark the end of a kind of spiritual despair. Eliot’s poems in the years after, including “The Hollow Men” (1925) and “Ash Wednesday” (1930), suggest a transition that culminates in the spiritual solace that characterizes his elaborate meditations *Four Quartets*. Eliot did, in fact, become a dedicated member of the Church of England, and much of his later writing portrays this struggle for faith, including *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Cocktail Party*, and various essays and books on religion. As well as writing poems and critical essays, Eliot also wrote plays, some of which were produced on Broadway and in London’s West End. In 1948, Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ Although written in free verse, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” continues the long-standing poetic tradition of the dramatic monologue. Students will probably be most familiar with the dramatic monologues of English poet Robert Browning, such as “My Last Duchess.” Reading one of these famous poems can help students understand that the speaker is Prufrock, a fallible and possibly unreliable character and not the voice of Eliot himself. Try having your students stage the different parts of the monologue, using voices appropriate to the words. A similar strategy can be used for “Gerontion,” which is also in the form of a dramatic monologue. Students often find the fragmented form, esoteric allusions, and disembodied speaker difficult and frustrating. Before discussing Eliot in class, have students write a line-by-line paraphrase of the poem and then a quick (three-to-four-sentence) plot synopsis. Begin class discussion by breaking into groups to compare the plot summaries and paraphrases. Each group should come up with a “master” version; then have the class discuss the poem as a whole.

■ Consider beginning your discussion of Eliot with “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” Encourage students to read the poem aloud and to listen to the sounds and rhythms. Instead of focusing on the footnotes, help them appreciate the lyric quality of Eliot’s verse.

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** How would you describe the speaker in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”? What are his fears? Is he a sympathetic character? Why does he ask so many questions? What is the

significance of the title? How would you describe the tone of this poem?

**Comprehension:** Some readers have argued that Tiresias is the narrator of *The Waste Land*, a voice behind all the other voices. When he appears in “The Fire Sermon” in line 217, he says “I, Tiresias.” Who is this figure in classical mythology? Why might Eliot choose to invoke him here? How does he relate to other themes in the poem?

**Comprehension:** In “Tradition and the Individual Talent” Eliot writes: “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.” What does Eliot mean here? Does he follow his own dictum? What would he say of other poets in this unit?

**Context:** “Learning of German Retreat from Her District,” in the archive, depicts some of the devastation inflicted upon the European landscape. In the video, critic Lisa Steinman argues that, like the war-torn buildings, *The Waste Land* “is, in fact, a kind of rubble of stuff that used to have meaning and used to go together and that doesn’t seem to go together.” What are the fragments from which *The Waste Land* is composed? From what cultures do these fragments originate? What sorts of images would you use to illustrate this text?

**Context:** Many readers have noted that *The Waste Land* is written in an apocalyptic mode; that is, it functions as a work of crisis literature that reveals truths about the past, present, and/or future in highly symbolic terms, and it is intended to provide hope and encouragement for people in the midst of severe trials and tribulations. What crises do the characters in *The Waste Land* face? Given this context, how do you read the ending of the poem? Is the final line triumphant or apocalyptic?

**Context:** How does Eliot’s brand of modernism differ from Williams’s? Do they share any ideas, beliefs, or techniques?

**Exploration:** What is the effect of the host of esoteric allusions in *The Waste Land*? Why do you think Eliot chooses the kinds of references he does? Why does he draw from so many different religions?

**Exploration:** In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot argues that “if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, ‘tradition’ should positively be discouraged.” What keeps Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” from merely “blindly” or “timidly” adhering to the tradition of dramatic monologues? What is uniquely modern about Eliot’s innovations?

#### ELIOT WEB ARCHIVE

**[4995]** Barry Hyams, *T. S. Eliot, Half-Length Portrait, Seated, Facing Slightly Right, Holding Eyeglasses* (1954), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-109122]. T. S. Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and studied at Harvard, but spent most of his adult life in Europe. Eliot was a student of Sanskrit and Buddhism, and his poetry was deeply influenced by orientalism as well as neoclassicism.

**[6971]** Underwood and Underwood, *Learning of German Retreat from Her District, French Woman Returns to Find Her Home a Heap of Ruins* (1917), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-115012]. Photograph of woman looking at the ruins of her home in the Somme region. Many modernist writers were shaken by the unprecedented devastation of World War I.

**[7105]** *New York Times* Paris Bureau Collection, *London Has Its Biggest Raid of the War* (1941), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. Photograph of a London building destroyed by bombs. London experienced heavy fire bombing during World War II.

**[7658]** Herbert Johnson, *Future Pastimes. Breaking the News to Her Papa—by Radio* (1922), courtesy of the Library of Congress. Cartoon depicting a young woman telling her father of her engagement over the radio. For some, the broadened communication made possible by the radio was inspiring. For others, like Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and the father in this picture, the new technology was cause for alarm.

**[8949]** Lisa M. Steinman, Interview: “Rhythms in Poetry” (2003), courtesy of *American Passages*. Professor of English and humanities Lisa M. Steinman discusses *The Waste Land*.

**[9140]** Robert Browning, *My Last Duchess* (1842), courtesy of Project Gutenberg. Robert Browning’s poem “My Last Duchess” is a quintessential example of the dramatic monologue. The first-person speaker is a duke who hints at the murder of his last wife, even as he arranges a new marriage. The dramatic monologue was a form later used by T. S. Eliot (see “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”).





**[3939]** Underwood and Underwood, *Famous New York African American Soldiers Return Home* (1917), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

#### MCKAY WEB ARCHIVE

**[3939]** Underwood and Underwood, *Famous New York African American Soldiers Return Home* (1917), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. The 369th (former 15th New York City) regiment marches in Harlem, including Lieutenant James Reese Europe, a well-known musician. African American veterans advocated for civil rights. *Home to Harlem* (1928), by Harlem Renaissance writer Claude McKay, tells the story of an African American soldier's life after his return from the war.

**[4766]** Aaron Douglas, *The Judgement Day* (1927), courtesy of The Walter O.

#### Claude McKay (1889–1948)

Born in Jamaica, Claude McKay came to America to study agriculture at Tuskegee Institute, a historically black university founded by Booker T. Washington. After two years, he transferred to Kansas State College, but soon realized that his talents were better suited to writing than farming. In 1917, McKay arrived in Greenwich Village, where he sought out the company of artists and activists, both white and black. In fact, his ability to straddle both worlds easily became a source of envy and respect among his contemporaries. In those opening years of the Harlem Renaissance, McKay's poetry helped attract attention to the city and to the struggle for a new African American literary voice. While the earlier poetry that he had written in

Jamaica used dialect, his writing in America relied on traditional poetic forms. His electrifying sonnet "If We Must Die" made him famous; it also worked as a call to arms for African Americans living through the **Red Summer** of 1919. In the poem, McKay urges African Americans to "face the murderous, cowardly pack" and to "nobly die" while "fighting back." These images of blacks rising up against their white oppressors gave voice to the frustration and rage of the African American people at a time when racism seemed to be spiraling out of control. Although McKay is often credited with helping to spark the Harlem Renaissance, he took great pains to distance himself, both physically and philosophically, from the movement in its heyday.

McKay left America for London in 1919, where he read Marx and Lenin and worked for a communist newspaper. Although he did return to America to oversee the publication of his first volumes of poetry, *Spring in New Hampshire* (1920) and *Harlem Shadows* (1922), McKay became disillusioned with African American leadership and the disappointing state of race relations in the United States. He felt that the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, particularly Alain Locke and W. E. B. Du Bois, were discouraging artists from portraying black experience honestly. Refusing to enter the 1926 *Opportunity* prize contest, he wrote: "I must write what I feel what I know what I think what I have seen what is true and your Afro-American intelligentsia won't like it." McKay also felt that black editors, particularly of small magazines popular during the Harlem Renaissance, worried more about the reactions of white benefactors and audiences than they did about the integrity or political efficacy of the art. With sharp criticism for the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, which he voiced throughout his career, McKay left America for Russia in 1922. While abroad, he wrote his bestseller *Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo* (1929). His status as an exile, first as a Jamaican in America, and then as an American in Russia, colored his writing throughout his life. Poems like "Tropics in New York" represent this struggle with a double-consciousness. McKay returned to America, but not until 1934, by which time the Harlem Renaissance had ended, its writers dispersed and the fire of the movement dimmed.

## TEACHING TIPS

■ After reading Langston Hughes and some of the other poets in this unit who diverge from traditional forms, students will probably be struck by McKay's reliance on the sonnet. The sonnet form, however, has a long tradition of political engagement, one that goes back to the European Renaissance. In McKay's own lifetime, poets had skillfully reinvented the sonnet form to provide biting criticism of World War I, as seen in the work of British poet Wilfred Owen ("Dulce et Decorum Est"). The sonnet was particularly resonant for African American poets and was a popular form for men and women during the Harlem Renaissance. As critic Marcellus Blount argues, "For black poets, the sonnet has served as a zone of entrapment and liberation, mediation and self-possession . . . [black] poets have turned to the sonnet as an alternative space for performance, one that demonstrates the poet's craft while calling into question the marginality of black men and women in Euro-American discourse." What is the relationship between the highly structured form and McKay's subjects, for example, lynching ("The Lynching") and racial uprising ("If We Must Die")? Students should be encouraged to scan the poems, paying particular attention to where the meter or rhyme scheme intensifies or provides tension.

■ The violence in "The Lynching" and "If We Must Die," both written in 1919, becomes clearer and more significant when read about the historical context. The summer of 1919 was named the Red Summer because of the many racist uprisings around the country. Lynching reached a historical high that year, and blacks were appalled and frightened by the renewed vigor with which whites from Chicago to the Deep South were acting out their hatred and aggression.

## QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** In "Africa" who or what is the "harlot"? Why does McKay use this word?

**Context:** McKay uses several animal images in "If We Must Die." To whom does he refer each time? How do the images change? What do you associate with hogs? How are images of dogs associated with African American history, specifically slavery?

**Exploration:** How does McKay's language differ from that of other poets in this unit, particularly Harlem Renaissance writers? Why do you think he chooses to use this kind of diction? What kind of audience is he trying to reach? What kinds of political and social goals does his poetry seem to harbor?

**Exploration:** Compare McKay's use of the sonnet to that by African American poets Henrietta Cordelia Ray, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Gwendolyn Brooks. How does each adapt the sonnet form? How does their use of the sonnet differ from that of some of the other famous modernist sonneteers such as E. E. Cummings, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Robert Frost?

Evans Collection of African American Art. Aaron Douglas, *American* (1899–1979). Gouache on paper; 11 3/4" x 9". Douglas's painting incorporates images from jazz and African traditions and can be compared to "Harlem Shadows," by Claude McKay, and "The Weary Blues," by Langston Hughes.

**[5289]** Aaron Douglas, *Study for Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro Man in an African Setting* (1934), courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago: Aaron Douglas, *American*, 1899–1979, *Study for Aspects of Negro Life: the Negro in an African setting*, before 1934, gouache on Whatman artist's board, 37.5 x 41 cm, Estate of Solomon Byron Smith; Margaret Fisher Fund, 1990.416. Sketch of Africans dancing and playing music. This became part of a Harlem mural sponsored by the Works Progress Administration chronicling African American history, from freedom in Africa to life in the contemporary United States. Africa and ancestry were themes of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," by Langston Hughes, and "Africa," by Claude McKay. **[7390]** Samuel Herman Gottscho, *New York City Views. Vendor in Greenwich Village Area* (1914), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-G622-T-81587]. Greenwich Village has long been home to both artists and activists. Jamaican-born poet Claude McKay lived there in 1917.

**[7405]** Carl Van Vechten, *Portrait of Josephine Baker* (1949), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-93000]. Photograph of jazz musician Josephine Baker in Paris. Paris was a major center for modernist artists, perhaps because it was less restrictive than American cities. Poet Claude McKay portrays the tensions of African American performers in "Harlem Dancer."

**[9139]** Wilfred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum Est* (1921), courtesy of Project Gutenberg. Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" uses aspects of the sonnet form to critique his contemporaries' attitudes toward World War I. The sonnet form was also popular among writers of the Harlem Renaissance, most notably Claude McKay.

### Genevieve Taggard (1894–1948)

Born in Waitsburg, Washington, Genevieve Taggard was raised in Hawaii, where her parents ran a school. Taggard attended the University of California at Berkeley on a scholarship. In 1920 she moved to New York City, where she worked for publisher B. W. Huebsch and, along with several other writers, including Maxwell Anderson, started a journal, the *Measure*. She also married writer Robert Wolf that year and they had a daughter, Marcia. In 1922, Taggard published her first collection of poetry, *For Eager Lovers*. Taggard spent most of the 1920s in Greenwich Village, where she socialized with other writers and artists. During this time she edited a poetry anthology called *May Days*, which collected work from the radical socialist journals *The Masses* and *The Liberator*. She also taught at Mount Holyoke, where she wrote a biography of Emily Dickinson, *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson*, which was published in 1930.

The 1930s marked a turning point in Taggard's career. The Great Depression sparked a renewal of social and political awareness among writers, and although Taggard had sympathized with socialism since

her college years, only now did her poetry begin to show the imprint of her political leanings. As a contributing editor of the Marxist journal *The New Masses*, Taggard published poems, articles, and reviews. In her work she grapples with such timely issues as class prejudice, racism, feminism, and labor strikes. Unlike poets like Eliot and Pound, Taggard was very much concerned with the plight of the working class, and she used her poetry to raise social and political awareness. As her poetry suggests, Taggard remained an activist for most of her career. She participated in a host of organizations, including the Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, the United Committee to Aid Vermont Marble Workers, and the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy. In addition,

she was a member of the New York Teachers Union, the League of American Writers, and the U.S.-Soviet Friendship Committee.

In addition to her work as a social activist, Taggard was also deeply interested in radio and music. She saw radio as a means to make poetry and art accessible to the masses, and she often read her poems on the radio. Fascinated by the intersections between poetry and music, Taggard also wrote many poems that were later scored by such composers as William Shuman, Aaron Copeland, Roy Harris, and Henry Leland Clarke.

After more than a decade of marriage, Taggard and Robert Wolf divorced in 1934. The next year she married journalist Kenneth Durant and moved to a farm in East Jamaica, Vermont, a landscape that provided inspiration for her poetry. She also joined the faculty of Sarah Lawrence College, where she taught until her retirement in 1947. Although Taggard died at the comparatively young age of fifty-



[7106] *World-Telegram, Forgotten Women* (1933), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-113263].

three, she edited four books, wrote a biography, and published thirteen books of poetry.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ Review the basic tenets of Marxism with your students, including concepts like the proletariat. Marx thought that the ideal society would be classless and that the workers would own the means of production: “From each according to his ability; to each according to his need.” Taggard’s poetry reflects her close ties to Marxism. What themes, images, or techniques does she use to articulate the relationship between her poetry and politics? What does she expect art to accomplish?

■ Many of Taggard’s poems focus on the plight of working-class women. How does she portray the women in her poems? Which portraits are more sympathetic than others? Could Taggard be termed a feminist poet? Are there connections between Marxism and feminism that might be useful in understanding her work?

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** What is the meaning of the title “Everyday Alchemy”? What is Taggard saying about the relationship between the genders? How does her syntax help or hinder the message? Why does Taggard specify “poor” women? How should readers interpret the adjective “poor”?

**Comprehension:** In “With Child,” who or what is the “it” in the last stanza? What is the tone of the poem?

**Context:** The turn of the twentieth century witnessed the first wave of feminism in America, culminating in women gaining the right to vote in 1920. Much of Taggard’s poetry reflects this activism, though she concentrates on the working class. In “At Last the Women Are Moving,” how are the women portrayed? What are they protesting? Why are the last two lines in italics?

**Exploration:** Unlike Eliot and Pound, Taggard wrote poetry for the masses, and her interest in radio broadcast enhanced her ability to reach a wide and diverse audience with her verse. How does her notion of poetry and audience differ from that of other writers in this unit? With whom does she seem to share a similar outlook?

#### Jean Toomer (1894–1967)

Born in Washington, D.C., Nathan Eugene Toomer was raised by his grandparents. He studied at several universities, including the University of Wisconsin, Massachusetts College of Agriculture, and New York University. After college, he held a variety of jobs, including ship fitter, car salesman, and physical education teacher. Enamored of the art scene in Greenwich Village, Toomer soon became part of the intellectual crowd, making friends with people like Waldo Frank,

#### TAGGARD WEB ARCHIVE

**[2360]** Anonymous, *Listening to the Radio at Home* (1920), courtesy of the George H. Clark Radioana Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. Family seated around their radio in the early 1920s. Radio was the first affordable mass media entertainment to enter the homes of nearly all Americans. A powerful tool for rapid communication of news, radio also helped advertise products and spread music like jazz and swing around the country.

**[7106]** *World-Telegram, Forgotten Women* (1933), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-113263]. Unemployed and single women march in New York to demand jobs. Work relief programs during the depression often gave priority to men, on the assumption that the father should be a family’s primary wage earner.

**[8613]** Vito Marcantonio, *Labor’s Martyrs* (1937), courtesy of Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries. Socialist publication describing the “great labor martyrs of the past 50 years.” This pamphlet discusses the trial and public execution of the “Chicago Anarchists,” who organized the Haymarket bombing in 1887 as well as the trials of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927 and the Scottsboro Boys in the 1930s. The pamphlet goes on to talk about the thriving state of the 1930s labor movement.



Sherwood Anderson, Hart Crane, Alfred Stieglitz, and the renowned benefactress Mabel Dodge. His short stories and poetry, which he published in *The Dial*, *Broom*, *The Liberator*, *Opportunity*, *Crisis*, and other magazines, received high praise from Allen Tate and Kenneth Burke; indeed, his work was well received in both the white and the black communities. His ability to straddle cultures became a mixed blessing for Toomer; as he struggled to secure a stable identity in a nation with a long habit of dividing itself along racial lines. Light-skinned enough to “pass,” Toomer grappled with his complicated racial identity all his life. Toomer was not alone in this predicament; novelists James Weldon Johnson and Nella Larsen both explored the notion of passing in their fiction.

In 1923, Toomer’s most famous work, *Cane*, won the approval of critics and his fellow artists, though the book never sold well. Sometimes referred to as a prose poem, *Cane* is not easily categorized;

it includes verse and prose pieces. For young black writers, like Jessie Fauset and Charles S. Johnson, Toomer’s unconventional work confirmed the belief that African American artists could form a movement and use art to fulfill political aims. At a time when the Harlem Renaissance was just beginning to take shape, Toomer’s *Cane*, with its candid picture of rural and urban African American life, its picture of women, and its critique of modern industrialism, provided much-needed encouragement and promise; *Cane* endured as one of the most important works of the Harlem Renaissance.

*Cane* also proved to be Toomer’s best work. He left New York for France, and although he received generous financial support from Mabel Dodge, he did not manage to publish anything that gained the acclaim of *Cane*. In 1924 he traveled to Fontainebleau to study with the Russian mystic George Gurdjieff, whose work he later taught in

America. He experimented with communal living, and in 1932 he married a woman he met in one of these communities, Marjorie Latimer, a white woman from a prestigious New England family. She died in childbirth after only one year of marriage. In 1934, Toomer married another white woman, also named Marjorie. These marriages caught the attention of the media, and in his later years Toomer was often evasive about the question of his race. After the 1920s, Toomer virtually disappeared from the literary scene, but he did not stop writing. His unpublished plays, poems, and autobiographical sketches were collected in *The Wayward and the Seeking* (1980) after his death.



**[7104]** Marion Post Wolcott, *Cut Sugarcane Being Carried to the Trucks for USSC* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-051089-E].

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ It’s useful to talk about “passing” in relation to Jean Toomer. He was a pivotal figure in the Harlem Renaissance, despite his relatively early exit from New York, precisely because he was able to straddle

both white and black cultures so easily. Toomer's choice later in life to live as white rather than black also raises interesting questions about his art. How does he represent the struggle with racial identity? What does it mean to have the ability to change one's racial identity?

■ Depending on their familiarity with postmodern literature, your students may not find it odd that Toomer mixes poetry and prose; however, during his own day this was a highly innovative strategy. Students should be encouraged to ask what the relationship is between the prose and verse sections, as well as to question why Toomer couldn't just write *Cane* in one of these genres. What does Toomer say in verse that he didn't say in prose, and vice versa?

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** What is the significance of the title *Cane*? What associations come to mind? In the second and last stanzas of "Georgia Dusk" Toomer uses "cane" as an adjective. What is he describing? Who is the "genius of the South"?

**Context:** Toomer's descriptions of Fern link her to the landscape of the South and raise a number of questions. What was happening in the South between 1900 and 1930? What does this tell us about her? How would you characterize the relationship between Fern and the landscape? Why is she described as "cream-colored"? Why does she have such a mysterious effect on men? Why does the narrator mention cities like New York, Chicago, and Washington? Why does the narrator ask so many questions? The narrator leaves our questions unanswered. What is the effect of this ambiguous ending?

**Exploration:** One of the most striking qualities of *Cane* is its use of multiple genres. In fact, one of the hallmarks of modernist literature is the authors' penchant for mixing genres, particularly prose and verse. Why does Toomer blend so many genres—poetry, short stories, sketches, and a play—in *Cane*? What effect does this shift among types of writing produce? How does his method compare to that of other writers in this unit?

#### Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

Langston Hughes stands as one of the most prolific writers in American history: he wrote poetry, two novels, two autobiographies, three volumes of short stories, several plays and musicals, over twenty years of newspaper columns, twelve children's books, and countless essays. Born in Joplin, Missouri, James Langston Hughes spent most of his childhood in the Midwest. Hughes moved to Harlem in 1921, where the famous Harlem Renaissance was taking shape under the leadership of intellectuals like Alain Locke and benefactors like Carl Van Vechten. It didn't take long for Hughes's literary talent to be recognized. Before the year's end, Jessie Fauset, perhaps the most prolific novelist of the Harlem Renaissance, published Hughes's first short story, "Mexican Games," in *The Brownie's Book*. Also, Hughes's widely anthologized poem dedicated to W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro Speaks

#### TOOMER WEB ARCHIVE

**[3696]** Dorothea Lange, *Plantation Overseer. Mississippi Delta, near Clarksdale, Mississippi* (1936), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-009596-C DLC]. White overseer and landowner with black workers.

Sharecropping initially appealed to freedmen because it promised benefits they had previously been denied. However, most sharecroppers ended up working in conditions that weren't much better than slavery, while whites retained economic, social, and political power.

**[4099]** Anonymous, *Tenants* (c. 1880–1900), courtesy of Duke University, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library. Photograph of African American tenant farmers or sharecroppers in the field. Although sharecropping gave African American families more control over their labor, it was rarely lucrative.

**[5510]** J. C. Covert, *White Cotton, Black Pickers and a Gin* (1915), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-120480 DLC]. Cotton was an important but resource-taxing and labor-intensive southern crop. Although the Southern Agrarians romanticized agricultural life, work on cotton plantations was difficult and rarely lucrative for African Americans.

**[7104]** Marion Post Wolcott, *Cut Sugarcane Being Carried to the Trucks for USSC* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-051089-E]. Photograph of a worker for the United States Sugar Corporation in Clewiston, Florida. African Americans labored in harsh conditions for many southern agricultural companies.



**[4768]** Aaron Douglas, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (1941), courtesy of The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art.

#### HUGHES WEB ARCHIVE

**[3099]** Anonymous, *Panorama of Joplin, MO* (c. 1910), courtesy of the Library of Congress. Langston Hughes was born in Joplin in 1902 and spent his childhood in Kansas, Illinois, and Ohio. He wrote his first poem in eighth grade and was named “class poet.”

**[3329]** Anonymous, *Langston Hughes in Honolulu, Hawaii, August, 1933* (1933), courtesy of Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and the Langston Hughes estate. Hughes vacationing in Hawaii. By his early thirties, Hughes had traveled to France, where he experienced a society in which race mattered little, and to Africa, where he was first exposed to ancient, non-Western cultures.

**[4554]** Prentiss Taylor, *Scottsboro Limited* (1931), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-4717]. Lithograph from *Scottsboro Limited*, a collection of four poems and a play by Langston Hughes protesting the incarceration, conviction, and death sentence of the Scottsboro boys, nine African American youths unjustly accused of raping two white women.

of Rivers,” appeared in *Crisis*. Despite his success, Hughes left the electrifying Harlem atmosphere for a two-year trip to Africa and Europe. His travels inspired in him a sense of awe for ancient and non-Western civilizations, an awe that reveals itself in the imagery of his later poetry.

Upon returning to America, Hughes worked as a busboy in a Washington, D.C., hotel until he was “discovered” once again, this time by poet Vachel Lindsay, and his poems were published in *Opportunity* and Alain Locke’s *The New Negro*. Hughes’s first collection of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, was published in 1926 with the help of his benefactor Van Vechten. In the same year, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” Hughes’s groundbreaking essay on the obstacles facing black artists, appeared in response to George Schuyler’s essay “Negro Art Hokum,” which argued that there was no such thing as a quintessentially Negro art. Both essays were published in *The Nation*, and they sparked a dialogue that resonated throughout the Harlem community. Hughes’s essay was important because it defended the possibility of an American art uniquely expressive of the black experience and because it challenged the elitism that often surfaced in the influential writings of Du Bois. For the last few years of the decade, patron Charlotte Mason, who also offered Zora Neale Hurston assistance, supported Hughes. By the end of the decade, Hughes had become synonymous with the Harlem Renaissance.

When the Great Depression struck the United States, Hughes, like many of his contemporaries, including Genevieve Taggard, turned to social and political activism. He embraced communism with its emphasis on working-class issues and racial equality. After his visit to the Soviet Union in 1932, Hughes wrote radical essays and articles and reported on the Spanish Civil War for the *Baltimore Afro-American*. While he continued to publish poetry throughout his life, he also began writing plays and books for children. In 1953 his radical activities brought him before Senator McCarthy’s committee, and the FBI considered him a security threat until 1959. During those six years, Hughes was unable to leave the United States.

Often called the poet laureate of Harlem, Hughes became famous for his innovative poetry, which appropriates the language, rhythm, and form of **jazz** and the blues. “The Weary Blues,” for example, mimics the traditional form of twelve-bar blues. With its syncopated rhythm, southern dialect, and crooning diction, it is no surprise that much of Hughes’s poetry has been set to music. While many intellectuals looked down on jazz and the blues as unrefined forms created by seedy characters, Hughes respected the artistry and originality of this new brand of African American music and recognized the unique contribution that it was making to American culture. Hughes wished to write about the black experience honestly. To Du Bois’s dismay, he insisted on using dialect and portraying a range of characters, not just the educated upper class, and he wrote with compassion and dignity

about working-class African Americans in poems like “Brass Spittoons” and “Elevator Boy.” Hughes also wrote passionately about the American-ness of blacks at a time when political leaders like Marcus Garvey were encouraging scores of blacks to migrate back to Africa. Influenced by the work of Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg, Hughes’s poetry unites racial self-awareness with a larger American identity.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ Hughes’s poems are meant for the ear as much as the eye. Have your students close their books and begin your discussion of “The Weary Blues” by reading the poem aloud to them. Ask them how they imagine the speaker actually performing this song.

■ It is useful to point out that Hughes did not write the kind of poetry that Harlem Renaissance leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke advocated. The intellectual leaders of the movement believed that art would bring about racial equality only if white audiences realized that black artists could produce polished works that were erudite and aesthetically sophisticated. The speakers in Hughes’s poems, however, range from vagabonds to blues singers. You might begin a discussion of almost any Hughes poem by asking students to point out what is radical in the work and how the speaker differs from Alain Locke’s concept of the “New Negro” and from the speakers of some of the elegant sonnets by Claude McKay.

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** In “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” Hughes offers a list of famous rivers. Where are these rivers? Why might he choose these specific rivers? What do they have in common?

**Comprehension:** In “I, Too” the speaker says, “I am the darker brother.” What does he mean? Why does he eat in the kitchen? What does he mean when he says that he’ll eat at the table “tomorrow”? What connection is the speaker making to America? What is the significance of the title?

**Context:** “Mulatto” was written at the height of the Harlem Renaissance. How does this poem conflict with the values and goals set forth by the leaders of this movement? Why might people like W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke have objected to this poem?

**Context:** Hughes pays close attention to the structure of his poems, but he has a very different attitude toward poetic form than his contemporary Claude McKay. How does Hughes’s verse differ from McKay’s? Why do you think Hughes makes the choices he does? What is Hughes trying to convey about black experience and identity through his form?

**Context:** “Note on Commercial Theater” was written almost two decades after the Harlem Renaissance. What is Hughes objecting to in this poem? Are the same issues still relevant today?

**[4768]** Aaron Douglas, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (1941), courtesy of The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art. Drawing of an African American man in a natural setting for Langston Hughes’s poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” Aaron Douglas’s art arose out of the Harlem Renaissance and New Negro Movement.

**[5100]** Gordon Parks, *Portrait of Langston Hughes* (1943), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USW3-033841-C] and the Langston Hughes estate. Following the depression, Langston Hughes’s vocal support of communism led to his being called on to testify before Congress in 1953. Hughes was drawn to communism’s emphasis on racial equality.

**[5183]** Valerie Wilmer, *Langston Hughes in Front of Harlem Apartment* (1962), courtesy of Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library and the Langston Hughes Estate. Like William Carlos Williams and Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes admired Walt Whitman and created literary personas that spoke to more than his own experience. In particular, Hughes was committed to portraying everyday African American life in his poetry.

**[5196]** Anonymous, *Langston Hughes at Age 3* (n.d.), courtesy of Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and the Langston Hughes estate. Langston Hughes was raised by his maternal grandmother, the widow of Lewis Sheridan Leary, who was killed at Harpers Ferry, and for his great-uncle, John Mercer Langston (brother to his grandmother’s second husband), who also played a part in the raid at Harpers Ferry.

**[5198]** Anonymous, *Langston Hughes at Age 22* (1924), courtesy of Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and the Langston Hughes estate. Poet Langston Hughes sought to portray the experiences of African Americans with honesty and challenged the elitism of W. E. B. Du Bois. Like Du Bois, however, he was an active social critic who fought for civil rights.



**Exploration:** Hughes seems particularly concerned about American identity in his poetry. Why do you think he writes so often about America as opposed to Africa? How do poems like “I, Too” and “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” treat identity?

**Exploration:** Compare “I, Too” to the opening section of Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself.” Why does Hughes allude to this poem? What does the allusion add to his work?

### **H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) (1886–1961)**

Born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Hilda Doolittle attended exclusive private schools in Philadelphia and was admitted to Bryn Mawr College. Her father was a professor of mathematics and astronomy at Lehigh University and the University of Pennsylvania. After attending Bryn Mawr for two years, H.D. stopped her formal schooling because of poor health.

Along the way, Hilda had fallen in love with young Ezra Pound. In 1911, when she traveled to England, Pound was waiting for her. Pound’s friendship and encouragement enabled her to launch her own writing career. He helped her to publish her first poems in *Poetry*, and later in the anthology *Des Imagistes* (1914); he also gave her the pen-name H.D. by which she became widely known. Inspired by Pound’s endorsement of *vers libre*, imagism, and vorticism, H.D. aimed to write tight, concise poems, resonant in the tradition of the haiku. Deeply interested in classical Greek literature, she brought Greek mythology and the words of classical poets into her own verse. Her poems are also characterized by their vivid descriptions of natural scenes and objects, which often stand for a feeling or mood. Her first collection of poetry, *Sea Garden* (1916), reflects the interests and techniques that were to remain central to her work.

Like many of the other poets in this unit, H.D. spent most of her adult life out of the United States. In 1913, she married fellow poet and imagist Richard Aldington, who shared her passion for Greek literature. The marriage soon ended, and H.D. was left as a single mother with little money. She soon forged a close relationship with a woman named Winifred Bryher, the daughter of a successful businessman. Bryher, who wrote historical novels herself, fell in love with H.D. and supported the poet financially for the rest of her life, allowing her the leisure to write and travel as she wished. H.D.’s companionship with Bryher probably inspired several prose pieces, namely *Pilate’s Wife*, *Asphodel*, and *Her*, which dealt candidly with lesbianism, but they were not published until after her death. In 1933, with the encouragement of Bryher, H.D. left London to become a “pupil” (H.D.’s word) of Sigmund Freud. In 1939, she and Bryher returned to London, where they weathered the terrifying Blitz, the devastating German bombing campaign against London and other British cities. H.D. would write about this experience in her *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944), *Tribute to the Angels* (1945), and *The Flowering of the Rod* (1946). These poems were later collected under one title, *Trilogy* (1973). After a long and prolific career, during which she published



**[7105]** New York Times Paris Bureau Collection, *London Has Its Biggest Raid of the War* (1941), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

eight volumes of poetry, four novels, a memoir, and several critical works, H.D. died in Zurich.

#### TEACHING TIPS

■ Ask your students to review Pound's three tenets of imagism: (1) "Direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective"; (2) "To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation"; (3) "As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome." Which of H.D.'s poems seem to adhere to Pound's ideas most closely?

■ *The Walls Do Not Fall* was written after living in London during the Blitz. Ask your students how the poem reflects the experience of war? What modernist or imagist techniques does H.D. employ? How does this longer poem compare to some of the earlier works in the unit? What strategies or ideas does she continue? What seems new?

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** In "At Baia," what is the relationship between the title and the subject matter? Why does H.D. locate this poem in an ancient Roman town? Why does the author use parentheses? What is the significance of the flower imagery?

**Comprehension:** In "Helen," how is Greece portrayed? How does this poem about Helen, whose face is said to have launched a thousand ships and begun the Trojan War, differ from other works about her? What is the tone of the poem? What is significant about the end?

**Context:** Pound was one of H.D.'s mentors and an influential friend throughout her career. How do H.D.'s early poems, particularly "Mid-day" and "Oread," follow the rules of imagism or vorticism as espoused by Pound?

**Exploration:** Compare H.D.'s "Leda" to Yeats's earlier poem, "Leda and the Swan." How do the poems differ? What is the tone of each? Does the reader sympathize with Leda? How does the diction differ?

#### Suggested Author Pairings

##### LANGSTON HUGHES AND CARL SANDBURG

Both of these writers were preoccupied with creating a distinctly American voice, and both believed that art and politics were intimately connected. Whereas Hughes wrote about the plight of black Americans, Sandburg portrayed the working class. Unlike the expatriate writers in this unit, Hughes and Sandburg wrote in the American idiom and treasured the history not of the elite, but of the oppressed. Compare the way these two authors treat historical and social events. What values do they perceive as fundamentally American? How do they define American poetry? What are the political goals of these authors?

##### H.D. WEB ARCHIVE

**[7105]** *New York Times* Paris Bureau Collection, *London Has Its Biggest Raid of the War* (1941), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. Photograph of a London building destroyed by bombs. London experienced heavy fire bombing during World War II.

**[7599]** Euphronios, *Calyx-Krater* (c. 515 B.C.E.), courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase, bequest of Joseph H. Durkee, gift of Darius Ogden Mills and gift of C. Ruxton Love, by exchange, 1972 (1972.11.10). Photograph © 1999 The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Greek bowl for mixing wine and water. Greek and Roman myths were central to the poetry of H.D., T. S. Eliot, and Robinson Jeffers.

**[7981]** Ando Hiroshige, *Inada/Buri/Warasa & Fugu* (1832), courtesy of the print collection of Connecticut College, New London. Woodcut of local fish by the Japanese painter and printmaker Ando Hiroshige. Imagist poets like H.D. and Pound were attracted to the minimalist characteristics of such art.

**[8005]** Anonymous, *Hilda Doolittle, Bust Portrait, Facing Right* (1960), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-122118]. H.D. was one of the founders of imagism, a school of poetry inspired in part by the minimalism of Oriental art, particularly the haiku form.

**[9141]** William B. Yeats, *Leda and the Swan* (1924), courtesy of Wikipedia <[www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leda\\_and\\_the\\_Swan](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leda_and_the_Swan)>. Yeats's "Leda and the Swan" describes the rape of Leda, mother of Helen of Troy, by the Greek god Zeus, who came to her in the form of a swan. H.D. also treats this subject in "Leda."

#### JEAN TOOMER AND CLAUDE MCKAY

Though both of these poets are regarded as central to the Harlem Renaissance, Toomer and McKay left Harlem early in the movement. Toomer often used dialect in his work, while McKay's poetry usually favors traditional European American poetic forms and diction. Yet both poets deal with radical subject matter in bold and original ways. The racial identity of both authors also provides rich fodder for discussion. Toomer, light enough to "pass," circulated among both black and white social groups in Harlem and lived his later life as a white man. McKay, born in Jamaica, struggled with forging his identity in America. What do these poets suggest about the varied and complicated notion of American identity? Must American poetry be written by native-born Americans? Must it be written in the United States?

#### H.D. AND WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

Both H.D. and William Carlos Williams wanted to pare down language to its essentials, and both believed that poetry should focus on the concrete rather than the abstract. Associated with imagism, H.D. was drawn to Greek literature and lived in Europe, while Williams grounded his poetry in American culture and history. These poets offer an interesting opportunity to explore not only varieties of imagism, but also what it means to be an American poet. How does the poetry of expatriate writers fit into the American tradition? Are poets like Williams, who write in the American idiom and who remained in the United States, more American than authors like H.D.?

#### ROBERT FROST AND T. S. ELIOT

Frost and Eliot, both giants of modern poetry, enjoyed incredible acclaim and success during their lifetimes. Hailed as the most famous living poet, Frost gave the inaugural address for President John F. Kennedy, and his lectures and readings around the country made him a virtual celebrity. Similarly, Eliot's role as poet, critic, and mentor cast a shadow of influence over the rest of the century. While both authors possess a wise voice, their poetry differs greatly. Associated with New England, Frost is a poet of the land, interested in the relationship between physical labor and reflection. His poetry is often narrative and usually meditative. He did not write in free verse, and his reflections are grounded in the American landscape, with its rugged beauty and pastoral associations. Frost's poetry is often concerned with moral and philosophical dilemmas as well as with ordinary experiences like mending fences and picking apples. Though his work can seem as dark as Eliot's at times, it also seems removed from modern society and historical events. In contrast, Eliot preferred to live and write in England. His expansive verse draws on many cultures, historical periods, religious traditions, and languages. His poetry, particularly *The Waste Land*, is difficult and allusive. In contrast to Frost's American landscapes, Eliot's poetry depicts society on the brink of radical, and perhaps destructive, change.

#### GENEVIEVE TAGGARD AND EZRA POUND

Both these poets sympathized with radical political philosophies, Taggard with socialism and Pound with fascism. These connections brought both authors under the scrutiny of the American government. While Taggard's poetry reflects her political ties, Pound's early work was written before his radical political leanings developed. How does Taggard's work reflect her commitment to socialism? How does gender influence her sympathies? How does Pound's poetry regard the common man or woman—as a potential reader and as a presence in modern culture? How might his attitude toward lowbrow and middle-class audiences foreshadow a move to the radical right?

### CORE CONTEXTS

#### Harlem in the 1920s: The Cultural Heart of America

At its peak in the 1920s, Harlem was the cultural and artistic heart of America. Stretching north of Central Park from Park Avenue in the east to St. Nicholas Avenue in the west and all the way up to 155th Street, Harlem was a city within a city, where black businessmen like Phillip Payton owned huge apartment buildings and rented them to black families and where black families could buy from black merchants. Harlem pulsed with promise and expectation for black America. From 1913 through the end of World War II in 1945, hundreds of thousands of African Americans relocated from the South to the urban North. Known as the **Great Migration**, this dramatic resettlement changed the face of American cities as blacks arrived by the thousands in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and especially New York City. With renewed racism fueled by Jim Crow laws (legalized segregation in the South) and a nationwide resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, African Americans looked to the urban North, where the world wars had created jobs and a hope of escape from rural poverty. As the most famous and vibrant cultural center of black American life, Harlem was transformed by this influx of people and talent. New arrivals like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston would become renowned artists. The move north was difficult, though. In Harlem, the South Side of Chicago, and other neighborhoods experiencing this sudden migration, housing conditions were often abysmal.

Artists and intellectuals also flocked to the cities. Some, like W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and Marcus Garvey, were already famous, and some, like Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas, and Zora Neale Hurston, hovered on the verge of fame. Harlem became such an important center of cultural vitality that it attracted many whites. The great photographer Alfred Stieglitz and bibliophile Arthur Schomburg were among the many nonblacks who mingled socially and intellectually with black artists and intellectuals, usually at parties hosted by people like Madam C. J. Walker, the first black woman millionaire,



[5479] Winold Reiss, *Drawing in Two Colors* (c. 1920), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-5687].



[5496] Harry Olsen, *Jazzin' the Cotton Town Blues* (1920), courtesy of Duke University.



**"HARLEM IN THE  
TWENTIES" WEB ARCHIVE**

**[3548]** Anonymous, *Louis Armstrong Conducting Band, NBC Microphone in Foreground* (1937), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-118977]. Louis Armstrong was one of the best-known jazz musicians of the 1930s. Jazz had an important influence in modernist writing and visual art.

**[4553]** James Allen, *Nella Larsen* (1928), courtesy of the Library of Congress. Portrait of Nella Larsen. The author of *Quicksand*, Larsen wrote novels and short stories that dealt with race, class, and gender. She was associated with the Harlem Renaissance.

**[5289]** Aaron Douglas, *Study for Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro Man in an African Setting* (1934), courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago: Aaron Douglas, *American, 1899–1979, Study for Aspects of Negro Life: the Negro in an African setting, before 1934*, gouache on Whatman artist's board, 37.5 x 41 cm, Estate of Solomon Byron Smith; Margaret Fisher Fund, 1990.416. Sketch of Africans dancing and playing music. This became part of a Harlem mural sponsored by the Works Progress Administration chronicling African American history, from freedom in Africa to life in the contemporary United States. Africa and ancestry were themes of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," by Langston Hughes, and "Africa," by Claude McKay.

**[5479]** Winold Reiss, *Drawing in Two Colors* (c. 1920), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-5687]. Offset lithograph of African American man dancing; also titled *Interpretation of Harlem Jazz I*. Poets, novelists, and painters incorporated the imagery and rhythms of jazz in their art.

**[5496]** Harry Olsen, *Jazzin' the Cotton Town Blues* (1920), courtesy of Duke University. Sheet-music cover showing an African American band and couples dancing in formal attire. The New Negro Movement held that positive artistic representations of African Americans would lead to the acquisition of civil rights.

**[7134]** Anonymous, *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel* (n.d.), courtesy of *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*

and Carl Van Vechten, a white patron of the arts. By the mid-1920s, the Harlem Renaissance was in full swing.

Harlem became a hub of American popular culture, and thousands of people flooded to this small section of New York City to catch a glimpse of the nightlife, characterized by speakeasies, jazz clubs, and cabarets. As Langston Hughes wrote in 1926, "Harlem was in vogue." In these Harlem clubs, institutionalized racism took a peculiar form: although most of them, including the famous Cotton Club, featured black performers on stage, they banned blacks from the audience for fear of driving away white patrons. The injustice and irony of the situation was not lost on the artists of the period. In poems like "The Harlem Dancer," "He Was a Man," and "Visitors to the Black Belt," McKay, Brown, and Hughes criticize the veiled racism that made all things black—from jazz, dance, and variety shows—popular across America but unavailable to African American audiences.

On the other hand, African American artists gained respect and critical acclaim outside their own communities. The first all-black musical, *Shuffle Along*, opened at the 62nd Street Theater in midtown Manhattan in 1921, and African American performers like Josephine Baker and Paul Robeson became celebrities in Europe as well as in the United States. Jazz became a sensation in London, in Paris, even in Stalinist Russia, and many musicologists regard it as America's greatest musical contribution. From the black American experience in New Orleans, Chicago, and Harlem, jazz affirmed internationally the coming of age of African American culture.

Led by W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Charles S. Johnson, and others, the Harlem Renaissance had specific political aims. These leaders believed that art could help African Americans achieve social, political, and economic equality in America. The movement placed great faith in the **Talented Tenth**, Du Bois's term for an educated class of African Americans empowered to improve the situation for all. If African Americans could prove themselves as writers and artists, Du Bois reasoned, then the rest of society would ultimately acknowledge their importance, and their right to equality under the law and in social arenas. Du Bois's ideas conflicted with those of Booker T. Washington, who championed economic independence through vocational education; and they also caused bitter controversy among Harlem Renaissance writers, especially Brown, Hurston, and Hughes, because their art did not always portray blacks in a positive light. But controversy became a source of vitality, and the Harlem Renaissance produced some of the most vibrant and powerful American art of the twentieth century.

**QUESTIONS**

**Comprehension:** What were some of the historical and social developments that contributed to the cultural prominence of Harlem?

**Comprehension:** How did the physical space of Harlem contribute to an artistic renaissance?

**Context:** Renaissance leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke held distinct views about how black Americans could attain social equality in the United States. They believed that by demonstrating artistic ability and talent, African Americans could gain respect and acceptance for the race. They held that black artists should portray only positive attributes and dignified experiences of black Americans. However, many Harlem Renaissance authors and artists resisted that imperative. How do the authors in this unit reflect or challenge the values set forth by leaders of the Harlem Renaissance?

**Context:** Compare Aaron Douglas's *Study for Aspects of Negro Life*, in the archive, to Langston Hughes's poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." What is the relationship between Africa and the "New Negro" in each?

**Exploration:** Modernist poetry relies on the city as a symbol of modern culture and the human condition. How do Eliot's London, Sandburg's Chicago, and Hughes's Harlem all represent particular interpretations of the city and the modern condition?

**Exploration:** What do you think of Du Bois's concept of the Talented Tenth? What problems might this idea give rise to?

(1925), by James Weldon Johnson, Viking Press. Like many Sorrow Songs, these lyrics speak of the hope for delivery from sin and slavery. Compiler James Weldon Johnson, a major Harlem Renaissance intellectual and poet, self-consciously claimed slave ancestors and their creations as sources of cultural pride.

**[7406]** Staff photographer, Duke Ellington, *Half-Length Portrait, Seated at Piano, Facing Right* (1965), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-123232]. Photograph of jazz musician Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington playing the piano. Black musicians such as Ellington were a major force in the development of jazz, arguably the first truly American art form. The rhythms and images of the jazz aesthetic deeply influenced the writers and visual artists of the Harlem Renaissance.

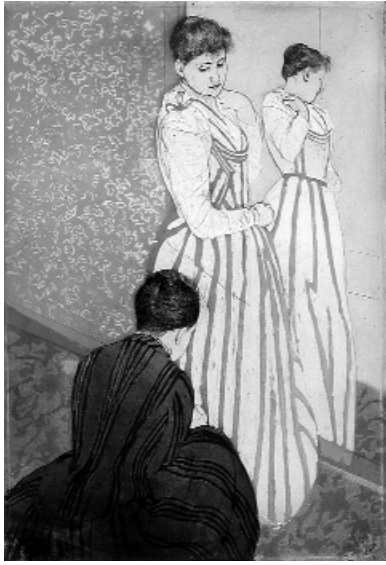
## Orientalism: Looking East

Although Japan had been opened up to the West in 1853, for modern Americans the Orient remained a place of great mystery, reverence, and intrigue. American readers reveled in the exotic paraphernalia of Japanese daily life described in works such as Matthew Calbraith Perry's *The Americans in Japan: An Abridgement of the Government Narrative of the U.S. Expedition to Japan*, and fascination with the Orient spilled over into U.S. architecture. While many American architects were producing classical styles, Frank Lloyd Wright was inspired by Japanese architecture, from which he borrowed the concept of the *tokonama*. Defined as the use of a permanent element in the home as a focus for contemplation and ceremony, *tokonama* can be seen in Wright's use of the hearth as the vertical axis from which the horizontal floors radiate.

The modernist fascination with the art and aesthetics of ancient Japan and China is also reflected in the writings of modernist poets. Overall, American culture was primed for **orientalism**; between 1870 and 1882, the Chinese population in America rose dramatically, fueled by a fourfold increase in new immigrants, chiefly from Canton. Wealthy collectors took an interest in traditional East Asian art, which began appearing in newly constructed museums in Boston, New York, Chicago, and other major cities. Japan modernized rapidly and emerged as a formidable military power, defeating Russia decisively in



**[7126]** Eisen, *Asakusa Temple in Winter* (c. 1810), courtesy of the print collection of Connecticut College, New London.



**[6662]** Mary Cassatt, *The Fitting* (1891), courtesy of the Library of Congress.

modern naval engagements that attracted the attention of the world. Moreover, the opulent, busy, literary and decorative styles of Victorian England and Belle Époque France were growing tiresome and predictable to young, independent thinkers, who hungered for aesthetic refreshment, for the austerity that the Japanese Zen tradition and the art of Imperial China seemed to embody.

Many modernist poets, artists, and architects, particularly Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, H.D., William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, William Butler Yeats, Marianne Moore, Georgia O'Keefe, and Frank Lloyd Wright, expressed their own personal fascination with the Far East. Late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century translations of Chinese poets like Qu Yuan, Tao Qian, Li Bo, Wang Wei, and Bo Juyi gained popularity in Western literary circles, helping to fuel this interest. For writers like Pound and Williams, the Orient did not represent a strange otherness, but rather an unexpected similarity in basic values. In 1913, Pound wrote that he felt “older and wiser” when looking at Japanese art, a sentiment shared by many of the modernist poets. When Wright set out to invent a “Prairie Style,” an architectural vernacular expressive of the landscape and values of the American Midwest, he turned for inspiration to the temples and palaces of ancient Japan.

One of the leading thinkers and mentors of his time, Pound did much to shape modernism and its theoretical underpinnings. Pound's affinity for the Orient is conspicuous in his haiku-like poems, such as “In a Station of the Metro.” He came to favor the poetry of China over that of Japan, and he spent much of his career studying and translating Chinese poetry. “The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter,” one of his most anthologized poems, is a moving translation of a Chinese poem that depicts a lonely teenage wife longing for her husband with simplicity and emotion. Pound admired in Chinese

poetry the impulse toward an economic, concrete verse, tendencies that became central to modernist poetry. Although his interest in China surfaces in a host of poems, *The Cantos* perhaps best illustrates his appropriation of techniques, themes, and allusions suggestive of Chinese poetry. The 1915 publication of *Cathay*, a collection of translated Chinese poems based partly on the writings of experts on the Orient, caught the interest of other modernist authors. Yeats experimented with the austerity and elegance of Japanese Noh drama, and the poetry of Wallace Stevens began to resonate with rhythms and images adapted from Chinese and Japanese poetry. Although Williams never discussed the place of the Orient in his own work, his early poetry also



**[7128]** Anonymous, *Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio* (c. 1933), courtesy of the Library of Congress [HABS, ILL, 16-OAKPA,5-2].

bears the mark of its influence.

Many characteristics that we associate with modernist poetry, including the use of ellipsis, allusion, and juxtaposition, have their roots in English translations of Chinese poetry. The Chinese ideogram,



and the related concept that a concise visual experience can suggest philosophical and psychological meaning, became a central idea in imagism and early modernism.

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** What cultural forces combined to make the Orient popular in the West? What characteristics does Asian poetry, in English translation, share with early modernist poetry?

**Comprehension:** What role did Pound play in bringing the Orient into Western modernism?

**Context:** Reread William Carlos Williams's "Willow Poem" and "The Widow's Lament in Springtime." How do the content and style of these poems suggest oriental motifs and aesthetics?

**Context:** How do Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" and "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter" show the influence of Chinese and Japanese poetry? How do these poems differ from Williams's poetry discussed in the previous question?

**Exploration:** For American poetry, what are the advantages and complications of drawing inspiration from Chinese and Japanese literature and art?

**Exploration:** Pound challenged modern poets to "make it [poetry] new," but he also appropriates much from ancient Chinese poets. How do we reconcile his call for newness with his search into the past?

#### Primitivism: An Antidote for the Modern

Perhaps only a few times has a piece of music changed the course of history. On March 29, 1913, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, composer Igor Stravinsky conducted his ballet *The Rite of Spring*. The choreography seemed unnatural, the costumes outrageous, and the musical innovations ear-shattering; the ballet tells of pagan sacrifice, and many in the audience were repelled or elated by it. Riots erupted as the performance ended. The performance was a decisive historical moment, affirming that European and American modernism would need to reckon with **primitivism**, a fascination with art from cultures that nineteenth-century intellectuals and politicians had regarded with condescension and scorn.

Part of the continuing importance of the Harlem Renaissance was the complex way in which it engaged with the "primitive" art of the marginalized African cultures which African Americans recognized as a collective past but which the Middle Passage and three hundred years in North America had made distant. In looking to "primitive" cultures for inspiration, writers were trying to recover a lost fundamental identity, perhaps a purer form of language, and a more graceful and personal way of representing experience.

While many white Americans visiting Harlem or other black neigh-

#### "ORIENTALISM" WEB ARCHIVE

**[6176]** Anonymous, *Some Designs and Executed Buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect* (1917), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-4297]. Cover of a Japanese journal highlighting Frank Lloyd Wright's work. Wright's architecture drew on Japanese art and design. Wright designed projects in both the United States and Japan, including the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo.

**[6662]** Mary Cassatt, *The Fitting* (1891), courtesy of the Library of Congress. In the 1890s, an exhibition of Japanese prints influenced Mary Cassatt to make her style more emphatic and to use bolder and more defined colors. Cassatt, like Henry James and Edith Wharton, was interested in realistically capturing the lives of America's upper class.

**[7119]** Shoshon, *Monkey Reaching for the Moon* (c. 1910), courtesy of the print collection of Connecticut College, New London. Japanese print showing a monkey hanging from a tree. Asian art became increasingly popular in the early twentieth century. Many modernist poets used Japanese and Chinese themes.

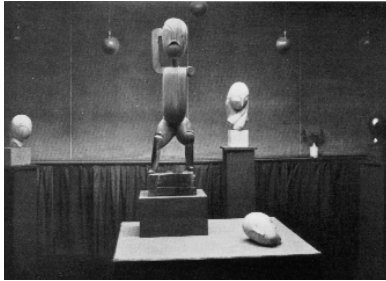
**[7126]** Eisen, *Asakusa Temple in Winter* (c. 1810), courtesy of the print collection of Connecticut College, New London. Japanese woodcut of temple in winter scene. Modernist poets used Asian religious and artistic themes, particularly emphasizing simplicity and nature.

**[7128]** Anonymous, *Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio* (c. 1933), courtesy of the Library of Congress [HABS, ILL, 16-OAKPA,5-2]. Photograph of entrance to Frank Lloyd Wright's studio, looking southeast, near Chicago; an example of how Wright used orientalism in his architecture.

**[7982]** Ando Hiroshige, *Minakuchi, #51 of the Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido Road, Tate-E Edition* (1855), courtesy of the print collection of Connecticut College, New London. Hiroshige produced many editions of this series of scenes from the highway between Kyoto and his native Edo (now Tokyo). Many modernist poets were drawn to the objectivity, precision, and connection with nature that characterize this art.

**[7984]** Ando Hiroshige, *Temple in the Park near Osaka* (n.d.), courtesy of the print collection of Connecticut College, New London. Painting from the *100 Views of Edo* series. Although early-twentieth-century Westerners saw the Orient as shrouded in exoticism, many modernist poets saw similarities between Eastern and Western culture.

**[7987]** Ohara Shoson, *Five Egrets* (c. 1927), courtesy of the print collection of Connecticut College, New London. These elegant birds are frequent subjects of oriental art. The style, forms, and content of Japanese and Chinese art were of great interest to a number of modernist poets.



**[7170]** Alfred Stieglitz, *Negro Art Exhibition, November, 1914* (1916), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-100177].



**[5289]** Aaron Douglas, *Study for Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro Man in an African Setting* (1934), courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago: Aaron Douglas, American, 1899–1979, *Study for Aspects of Negro Life: the Negro in an African setting*, before 1934, gouache on Whatman artist's board, 37.5 x 41 cm, Estate of Solomon Byron Smith; Margaret Fisher Fund, 1990.416.

borhoods expected African American artists to portray what were really little more than stereotypes, many black artists, like Claude McKay and Langston Hughes, sought deeper and richer connections with Africa; they experimented with primitivism, and their work shows a tension between their European intellectual heritage and their African lineage. This struggle to represent a split identity left many African American writers feeling conflicted. Many of the Harlem Renaissance poets explored the notion of the black American not only as a part of American history, but also as an indispensable foundation for the building of the country. Their poetry often suggested that the black person was more American than many of the country's white citizens.

This interest in African culture and tradition was not confined to Harlem. Indeed, Paris became known as the “Negro Colony” because so many African American artists moved there. As they mingled with other expatriates, they formed a network of learning and influence. Many of the artists studied formally at Parisian art schools, and their presence fostered an artistic exchange that changed modern art. The work of these black artists was recognized by French salons, publications, and exhibition spaces and contributed to modernist ferment on the Continent. Indeed, the connections between cubism and Africa are immediately recognizable in the angular lines, perspective, and subject matter of cubist paintings by Picasso and Braque.

Perhaps the best-known African American artist of the period was Aaron Douglas (1898–1979), who arrived in Harlem in 1924. An avid reader of African American journals like *Opportunity*, *Crisis*, and *Survey*, he was an active force on the art scene. Douglas soon adopted an abstract “African” style that borrowed much from African culture and Cubism. His flat, stylized figures were immediately recognizable, and Douglas went on to illustrate the books of thirteen Harlem Renaissance writers, including Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and James Weldon Johnson. Douglas's art, along with that of many of his contemporaries, was exhibited around the country by The Harmon Foundation, which was set up to expose white Americans to African American art. It remains one of the leading collections of African American visual art.

Many of the Harlem Renaissance writers and artists, including Douglas, Hughes, and Hurston, relied on white patrons for financial support. White Americans like Paul Kellogg, Albert C. Barnes, Carl Van Vechten, and Charlotte Osgood Mason were instrumental in making it possible for these artists to create and display their work. Although the patrons had good intentions, their patronage raised complicated questions. Some believed that black art was compromised by white patronage because the African American artists felt it necessary to please their benefactors. The patronage relationship also underscored the perception that most of these artists never broke the connection to the larger culture. Indeed, according to Harlem Renaissance expert Nathan Huggins, much of the art was ultimately created for white audiences. Some critics have also observed that the patrons were so interested in encouraging black art that they did so without

due regard for skill and talent, and that the real genius of the Harlem Renaissance was overwhelmed by mediocre work. African American painter Romare Bearden (1911–1988), for example, complained that too much African American art was unoriginal and uninspired.

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt assumed office in 1933 and initiated a host of governmental programs to recharge the American economy, artists and writers were recruited and paid to produce murals and sculpture for public places, books about American places and history, and literary works for a broad and dispirited populace, eventually turning out over 100,000 paintings, 18,000 sculptures, and 2,500 murals for post offices, courthouses, schools, and other public buildings. The arts in the United States were saved from insolvency by massive federal support. Along with the opportunity, however, some artists felt a pressure to adapt the imagination to government service, to become, in a sense, public employees. Though the American artist never experienced the regimentation and thought-control which overwhelmed the arts in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Soviet Union under Stalin, the freewheeling bohemianism down in Greenwich Village and up in Harlem gave way to production that was more predictable in intention and style.

The liberalism and populism of the Roosevelt administration and the **New Deal** intensified the interest in American folk culture, fostering a home-grown variation on the “primitive.” As early as 1901, W. E. B. Du Bois had praised the power of Negro spirituals in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Decades later, African American authors like Zora Neale Hurston, who traveled to the black villages of Florida collecting folk tales, Langston Hughes, who wrote children’s stories that drew on the folk tradition, and Jacob Lawrence, who painted ordinary African Americans in rural and urban settings and chronicled the Great Migration, contributed to a revival of interest in the culture of the common man and woman. Many poets, including Sterling Brown, experimented with writing exclusively in dialect—a move that not only recognized the importance of a black idiom, but also portrayed its vibrancy.

Ordinary American life colors the poetry of William Carlos Williams and Robert Frost. Frost revealed an enormous psychological and moral complexity behind the simple, austere surfaces of the New England back country; Williams found beauty in the most ordinary of urban places. Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, and Genevieve Taggard carried Whitman’s legacy into the twentieth century, celebrating the sound of spontaneous vernacular voices and finding wonder in ordinary language and the pace of American speech.

Even so, an interest in the ancient, the primitive, and folk traditions could carry artists in very different directions. Modernist poets like H.D., T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound unearthed and alluded to arcane texts, near-forgotten medieval ballads, classical verse, and primordial myths that seem to transcend cultures.

## “PRIMITIVISM” WEB ARCHIVE

**[2944]** Anonymous, *Aaron Douglas with Arthur Schomburg and the Song of Towers Mural* (1934), courtesy of Arthur Schomburg Photograph Collection, Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Douglas was commissioned to paint murals for the New York Public Library under the Works Progress Administration. This mural represents African American migration from the South to the urban North.

**[4410]** Anonymous, *Ernest Hemingway on Safari in Africa* (1933), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administrations, JFK Library. Photograph of Hemingway with elephant carcass and gun. Hemingway traveled extensively and based his novels in various locales.

**[4766]** Aaron Douglas, *The Judgement Day* (1927), courtesy of The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art. Aaron Douglas, American (1899–1979). Gouache on paper; 11 3/4" x 9". Douglas’s painting incorporates images from jazz and African traditions and can be compared to “Harlem Shadows,” by Claude McKay, and “The Weary Blues,” by Langston Hughes.

**[5289]** Aaron Douglas, *Study for Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro Man in an African Setting* (1934), courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago: Aaron Douglas, American, 1899–1979, *Study for Aspects of Negro Life: the Negro in an African setting*, before 1934, gouache on Whatman artist’s board, 37.5 x 41 cm, Estate of Solomon Byron Smith; Margaret Fisher Fund, 1990.416. Sketch of Africans dancing and playing music. This became part of a Harlem mural sponsored by the Works Progress Administration chronicling African American history, from freedom in Africa to life in the contemporary United States. Africa and ancestry were themes of “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” by Langston Hughes, and “Africa,” by Claude McKay.

**[7170]** Alfred Stieglitz, *Negro Art Exhibition*, November, 1914. Brancusi

*Sculpture, March 1914* (1916), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-100177]. These photographs of two art exhibits illustrate the popularity of African American art and show how primitivism and African images influenced white artists such as Constantin Brancusi.

**[7408]** Carl Van Vechten, *Portrait of Bessie Smith Holding Feathers* (1936), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-94955]. Writers and musicians of the Harlem Renaissance debated how best to depict African Americans, especially in terms of gender. Bessie Smith was a New Negro artist who embraced primitivism and the use of African images.

## QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** What were some of the manifestations and characteristics of primitivism in the literature of the 1920s and 1930s?

**Context:** H.D. draws on ancient mythology frequently in her poetry, often retelling the myths with a focus on female protagonists. Some of her favorite heroines are Helen of Troy, Leda (the mother of Helen), and Eurydice, the wife of Orpheus. Why do you think she chooses the particular stories and figures that she does? How does her use of mythology differ from that of Pound and Eliot?

**Context:** Would you make a distinction between “primitive” and “folk” in American poetry? Which poems suggest such a difference?

**Exploration:** Imagine a debate between Sterling Brown and Robert Frost about the use of primitivism or folk traditions in American literature. What might be the key differences in their perspectives?

## EXTENDED CONTEXTS

### Broadcasting Modernization: Radio and the Battle over Poetry

With the creation of nationwide radio networks and the drop in the cost of home equipment, poetry, jazz, symphonic music, and fresh commentary on the news and the arts became available to a vastly expanded audience, including people who could not read. The immediacy of radio and the increased access to the arts that radio gave people of all classes revolutionized American culture.

For many American poets, including William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes, and Robert Frost, this change was welcome. Their search for an American idiom and more accessible subject matter complemented this modern medium. For Sandburg and Taggard, the ability to reach a cross-section of the public increased the reach and influence of their words. The immediacy of radio created an intimacy between poet and audience, and the medium played a crucial role in turning the poet into a celebrity figure.

Other poets, including Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, regarded the popularization of art as a threat. They prided themselves on writing poetry that was allusive and difficult. For them, poetry was not meant to be mainstream. Broadcasting poetry seemed a degrading form of commercialization, a mass-consumer approach to art (although Eliot *did* present his work on the radio). To these artists, radio meant that art would become the territory of middlebrow taste.



**[2360]** Anonymous, *Listening to the Radio at Home* (1920), courtesy of the George H. Clark Radioana Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.



## QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** How would you describe elitism in art? Where do you find it? Why did some modernists seek to be elite or obscure? Why did some poets resist the popularization of poetry through radio broadcast?

**Context:** Read Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" aloud. How does hearing the poem (as opposed to reading it) affect your interpretation and appreciation? What do you gain from hearing the poem read aloud? Are some possibilities lost in the process?

**Context:** Reread the poems of Carl Sandburg and T. S. Eliot. Which works do you think would work best on radio? What would be gained (or lost) by listening to these poems rather than reading them?

**Context:** We are often described as living in the "Information Age" in which access to all kinds of information, from instant news and sports to online texts of rare books, is instantly available to anyone with an Internet connection. Many American homes have multiple televisions. How have TV and the Internet affected the distribution and consumption of literature? Are there negative consequences of making art widely available to the public via radio, TV, and the Internet? How do these costs compare to the benefits? Do you think radio, TV, and the Internet have had a positive effect on the arts? How have these media affected the way the public appreciates or doesn't appreciate highbrow culture, specifically poetry?

## The New Negro and the Reconstruction of African American Identity

The term "New Negro" came into use at the end of the nineteenth century, as a way of summarizing the various efforts of black Americans to put the culture of slavery behind them. By the 1920s, however, the term signified racial pride, economic independence, the struggle for social equality, and courageous expression in literature and the arts. When Alain Locke published his landmark anthology *The New Negro*, the term gained strong connections with the Harlem Renaissance. Small literary magazines abounded in Harlem during this period, and Locke's anthology had its origins in the March 1925 issue of *Survey Graphic*, a journal devoted to publishing young writers. The issue on Harlem was conceived by *Survey* editor Paul Kellogg, at a Civic Club dinner in November 1924, hosted by Charles S. Johnson, editor of *Opportunity*, a journal affiliated with the NAACP. Locke's collection of essays, poetry, and fiction quickly became landmark in the movement. Illustrated by Aaron Douglas, the book also included a bibliography of important artists, thinkers, and events of the Harlem Renaissance.

Leaders of the Harlem Renaissance believed that art should portray African Americans in a positive light, emphasizing literacy, artistic sophistication, and other qualities that could win respect among the dominant American majority. African American photographers, working in Harlem and across America, played an important role in con-

## "BROADCASTING MODERNIZATION" WEB ARCHIVE

[2360] Anonymous, *Listening to the Radio at Home* (1920), courtesy of the George H. Clark Radioana Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. Family seated around their radio in the early 1920s. Radio was the first affordable mass media entertainment to enter the homes of nearly all Americans. A powerful tool for rapid communication of news, radio helped advertise products and spread music like jazz and swing around the country.

[2363] Anonymous, "Radiotron" Vacuum Tube Display (1927), courtesy of the George H. Clark Radioana Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. Department store display of vacuum tubes for radios. The advent of the radio allowed people from all walks of life to have access to poetry and classical music and set the stage for what was to become "pop culture."

[5177] Russell Lee, *Radio with Ornaments and Decorations* (1938), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-011602-M2 DLC]. Radio with photographs and knickknacks on top, in the home of a Farm Security Administration client near Caruthersville, Missouri. Radios made art and news accessible to a larger audience.

[5225] Russell Lee, *John Frost and Daughter Listening to Radio in Their Home* (1940), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-037961-D DLC]. Father and daughter inside a farm home in Tehama County, California, listen to the radio together. Radio was an important source of art, entertainment, and information for many families.

[5226] Marion Post Wolcott, *A More Well-to-Do Miner Listening to the Radio When He Returns Home in the Morning After Working on the Night Shift* (1938), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-050293-E]. Family seated around radio. Many poets, among them Genevieve Taggard, were excited about the advent of radio, especially because



they were able to broadcast their poetry to a wide range of people.

**[5594]** Anonymous, *It Was Common Practice for Small Town and Country Dealers to Bring Radios Directly to Prospects and Customers Alike* (1925), courtesy of the George H. Clark Radioana Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. Photograph of dealers delivering radios from vehicle. Increased geographical mobility and mass culture were intertwined. As travel became easier, small towns became less culturally isolated.

**[6137]** Doubleday, Page and Company, *Radio Broadcast* (1926), courtesy of the Library of Congress. Promotional material for radio broadcasting technology. Technological developments made art more accessible to larger audiences and contributed to a sense of breaking with the Victorian era.



**[4766]** Aaron Douglas, *The Judgement Day* (1927), courtesy of The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art. Aaron Douglas, American (1899–1979). Gouache on paper; 11 3/4" x 9".

veying that ideal. The photographs of James Van Der Zee emphasize values and concepts central to the New Negro and the aspirations of the race. With images of black war veterans, dignified parades, and “Striver’s Row,” he portrayed the pride, accomplishment, and patriotism associated with the New Negro.

Small circulation magazines, like *Survey*, *Opportunity*, *Fire*, and *Crisis*, helped to fuel the movement by providing forums for new poetry, fiction, and art. The annual prizes offered by *Opportunity* helped young writers like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston gain acceptance in New York literary circles. In turn, the editors of these magazines gained influence as discoverers of talent—and some of their choices sparked controversy, especially narratives and poems that portrayed African Americans talking in dialect, drinking in bars, or straying from the New Negro role model. There were also controversies when these publications engaged directly with racism, lynchings, miscegenation, and other unresolved dilemmas in black and white American life. The courage of these writers and their editors in representing life honestly and with dignity in works like “The Weary Blues” or *Cane* reflects the spirit of the New Negro and the Harlem Renaissance.

#### QUESTIONS

**Comprehension:** What does the “New Negro” signify, and how did the term become popular?

**Comprehension:** What social and cultural developments supported the flourishing of African American art?

**Comprehension:** Describe some of the debates that arose between leaders and artists of the Harlem Renaissance.

**Context:** How do the African American authors in this unit either fulfill or reject the concept of the New Negro? Does the poetry follow Alain Locke’s aesthetic guidelines? What stereotypes does the art of this period embrace or deny?

**Exploration:** When Alain Locke published his article “The New Negro” in the 1925 publication of the same name, he ignited a wave of excitement and debate throughout the African American community. What was new about the concept of the New Negro? What political and social responsibilities did the New Negro artist have? What kinds of conflicts arose from these duties? Do you think that art can bring about political change? How do you think the concept of the New Negro has influenced African American identity today? Has it influenced current artists?

**Exploration:** Many of the authors in this unit interacted closely with powerful and wealthy white patrons. To some critics, these relationships lessened the integrity of the art. On the other hand, many argue that without the white support, much of the art of this period would not have been produced. What were some of the possible advantages and disadvantages of white patronage for these African American artists?

## ASSIGNMENTS

### Personal and Creative Responses

1. *Journal*: Try to imagine what it might have been like for a black person moving from a small town to Harlem in the 1920s. What would they have encountered? What would the atmosphere have been? What might they have done for fun on a weekend night? What kinds of frustrations might they have met with? What might have surprised or pleased them?
2. *Poet's Corner*: Reread William Carlos Williams's "This Is Just to Say." Choose a topic of your own and write a poem that imitates his style. Think about what kind of subject matter Williams writes about. What does his language sound like? What are the features of his verse? After you've written your poem, write a short paragraph analyzing what you wrote. What characteristics of Williams's work were you trying to capture?
3. *Poet's Corner*: Read Kenneth Koch's hilarious imitation of Williams's "This Is Just to Say": "Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams" (*Thank You, and Other Poems* [New York: Grove Press, 1962]). Ask your students to write their own parody of one of the modernist poems they have read.
4. *Doing History*: For the ancient Greeks, the Trojan War (c. 1200 B.C.E.) marked an important turning point in their collective identity. For the modernists, World War I functioned as an earth-shattering moment that signaled the end of the Victorian era and the beginning of the modern age. Reread some of H.D.'s poems that rely on classical mythology. Do some research on a myth that particularly interests you. How is H.D.'s telling of modern history enhanced by her use of past histories? What is added to her poetry when she uses histories steeped in myth rather than factual historical allusions?
5. *Multimedia*: Many of the artists in this unit looked to the visual arts and music for inspiration. Look at the paintings in the archive by Aaron Douglas and Jacob Lawrence, as well as items that reflect the primitivist and orientalist orientations of many modernist poets. In addition, listen to some jazz. How do the formal and aesthetic characteristics of these works relate to the poetry featured in this unit? What are specifically American images, sounds, or verses? What, if any, authentic national identity can be forged from these many sources?



**[3012]** Austin Hansen, Count Basie and the Nicholas Brothers (c. 1940s), courtesy of Joyce Hansen and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.



**[8083]** Jacob Lawrence, *Rampart Street (aka Harlem Street)* (1941), courtesy of the Estate of Jacob Lawrence. Collection of the Portland Art Museum, Oregon. Gift of Jan de Graaff.

### Problem-Based Learning Projects

1. You have been asked to illustrate a collection of poetry from the Harlem Renaissance using archival footage, photographs, artwork,

**"NEW NEGRO"  
WEB ARCHIVE**

**[3012]** Austin Hansen, *Count Basie and the Nicholas Brothers* (c. 1940s), courtesy of Joyce Hansen and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. Count Basie (pictured with Fayard and Harold Nicholas, internationally renowned tap dancers) was a leading figure in twentieth-century music, helping to define the style and nature of jazz and swing. Amiri Baraka and Michael Harper show jazz influences in their poetry.

**[3939]** Underwood and Underwood, *Famous New York African American Soldiers Return Home* (1917), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration. The 369th (former 15th New York City) regiment marches in Harlem, including Lieutenant James Reese Europe, a well-known musician. African American veterans advocated for civil rights. *Home to Harlem* (1928), by Harlem Renaissance writer Claude McKay, tells the story of an African American soldier's life after his return from the war.

**[4012]** Carl Van Vechten, *Portrait of James Baldwin* (1955), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-42481]. James Baldwin is remembered as a civil rights activist and the author of plays, poetry, short stories, and novels, including *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.

**[4565]** Prentiss Taylor, *Zora Neale Hurston* (n.d.), courtesy of Yale University Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Used with the permission of the Estate of Zora Neale Hurston. Photograph of Hurston dancing on couch. Known for her flamboyance and charisma, Hurston was sometimes urged by other artists to represent African Americans in more "dignified" ways.

**[4566]** Anonymous, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* dustcover (1937), courtesy of Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale Collection of American Literature. Zora Neale Hurston's best-known book, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was criticized by some African American authors and

newspaper articles, and manifestos from the era. Which poems will you choose and why? How will you order them? How will you help bring these poems to life for your readers?

2. You are an art critic for the *New York Times*, and you've been asked to write a column on the influence of oriental art on modernist culture, drawing on poetry, paintings, architecture, and music. Which works will you choose? What historical events are key for understanding Asia's influence? What works of oriental art most influenced the modernists?
3. Using the video archive, prepare a slide show on "primitivism" during the modern era for schoolchildren in which you explain the relationship between the historical events and art of the time. As well as choosing the pictures, you should also write a script that you will deliver to your young audience.
4. You have been asked to do a poetry reading for National Public Radio. Make a list of the poems you would choose to read. Why have you chosen these particular works? Then, practice reading the poems aloud, paying particular attention to how you're reading. How do you know where to breathe, pause, or stop? What words do you emphasize? Analyze the other performance choices you make as you practice the broadcast.

## GLOSSARY

**free verse** Poetry that does not depend on traditional form and meter. Some of the features of free verse include enjambment, visual patterning, and varying line lengths. With the exception of Frost, McKay, and Cullen, most poets in this unit wrote in free verse.

**Great Migration** The movement of thousands of African Americans from the South to the North. This mass relocation began at the turn of the twentieth century and continued through the 1920s, as black Americans left behind the racially divided South with its Jim Crow laws and enduring prejudices in the hopes that they would find equality and opportunity in the North. As the growing industrial section of the country, the North did offer more jobs, but dismal housing conditions, low wages, and racism made the North a disappointing destination for many blacks. Still, the steady increase in African Americans in the North, particularly in Harlem, made it possible for African Americans to build a sense of community and racial identity.

**jazz** A style of music that developed in America in the early twentieth century in New Orleans and other southern cities. It is characterized by syncopated rhythms, improvisation, extremes in pitch and dynamics, call and response, and experimentation. Jazz draws on traditional African American music, and swing jazz, which was popular in the 1920s, and has often been described as following the patterns of speech. Indeed, the instruments in a jazz piece often seem to be "talking" back and forth to one another.

**modernism** A literary movement that reached its peak in the

1920s, modernism developed in two rather different strands. American modernism, as practiced by Williams and Hughes, is characterized by an interest in portraying ordinary subject matter in concrete, vernacular language. Modernist poetry written in Europe, as characterized by Eliot, tends to be highly allusive. The poems are nonlinear and often refer to the modern condition, particularly the city, in a deeply critical manner. This strand of modernism tends to use a disembodied voice and a collage-like method.

**New Deal** Federal programs developed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration (1933–45) to restore economic stability and prosperity. The government created and funded thousands of jobs, many of them in public works and the arts.

**orientalism** A term coined by literary and cultural critic Edward Said to denote a fascination with Asian culture. For Said, it is this fascination, and cultural appropriation, which is real—rather than any actual image of Asian cultures. Modernist poets like Pound and Williams implicitly critique modern society by turning to Asian culture, which they see as foreign and exotic. Viewed as an escape from or alternative to the increasingly mechanized and alienating modern world, the Orient is used as a symbol of a more tranquil life. Modernist poets were attracted by particular characteristics of Asian art, including the affinity with nature, appreciation of the ordinary, and commitment to clean, economic language. Like primitivism, orientalism can often seem patronizing and even racist because it tends to view all Asians and Asian culture stereotypically.

**primitivism** An artistic style that privileges “simpler” times or cultures over a more “advanced” or modern way of life. Primitivism idealizes earlier times and it looks to rural living as an answer to the problems of modern civilization. Many twentieth-century poets idealized classical times by using mythology in their poetry. Other writers turned to Africa and images of the noble savage as an antidote to modern life.

**Red Summer** Term coined by James Weldon Johnson to refer to the period between June 1919 and the end of that year, during which twenty-five race riots erupted around the country. In addition, more than seventy blacks were lynched in 1925, and the Ku Klux Klan experienced a frightening revival in the South and Midwest. After serving bravely in World War I, many black veterans were understandably bitter and resentful when they returned to the United States and lost the respect that they had experienced as members of the armed forces.

**Talented Tenth** A term coined by W. E. B. Du Bois to refer to the upper echelons of the black race who would use their education and talent to improve the situation for African Americans. See the context on “the Talented Tenth” in Unit 9.

**vernacular** Language that sounds colloquial or imitates the everyday speech patterns of a group of people. Poets like William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes, and Robert Frost all write in the vernacular, but because they capture the conversational qualities of different groups of people, their verse sounds very different. In the modern period, many poets were interested in portraying characteris-

leaders because it did not emphasize racial oppression.

**[4766]** Aaron Douglas, *The Judgement Day* (1927), courtesy of The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art. Aaron Douglas, American (1899–1979). Gouache on paper; 11 3/4" x 9". Douglas's painting incorporates images from jazz and African traditions and can be compared to “Harlem Shadows,” by Claude McKay, and “The Weary Blues,” by Langston Hughes.

**[5183]** Valerie Wilmer, *Langston Hughes in Front of Harlem Apartment* (1962), courtesy of Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library and the Langston Hughes Estate. Like William Carlos Williams and Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes admired Walt Whitman and created literary personas that spoke to more than his own experience. In particular, Hughes was committed to portraying everyday African American life in his poetry.

**[8083]** Jacob Lawrence, *Rampart Street (aka Harlem Street)* (1941), courtesy of the Estate of Jacob Lawrence, Collection of the Portland Art Museum, Oregon. Gift of Jan de Graaff. Jacob Lawrence, known for his visual dramatizations of African American life, often painted series on subjects like Harlem, events and figures in black history, and even Hiroshima. A number of critics have likened Lawrence's style to African American music, including jazz and boogie woogie. Lawrence's paintings can be viewed in light of the poems of Langston Hughes and contrasted with the work of later African American artist Romare Bearden.



tically American speech and language. They felt that through language they could capture and create a uniquely American poetry and, perhaps also, a truly American identity.

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