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## Artistic Boundaries: Comparing William S. Bullard's Photographs and the Harlem Renaissance

**Essential Question:** What were the pervasive themes in the art of the Harlem Renaissance? How do these correlate to social and political issues at the time?

**Materials:** The students will need to be able to see the art in question. If you intend to use music or dance, then either a computer lab or a projector will be necessary, some way for the students to be able to see the material and hear it.

If using a projector or a computer, then the other images, such as artwork and sculpture, then those can also be projected. Otherwise the reference images will need to be printed for the students to see.

**Time:** This program could take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. It could be done as a mini program in 15 minutes. To adjust the amount of time simply change the number of items under discussion.

**Introduction:** (5 minutes)

Give the students a basic background to the Harlem Renaissance. If the students have not been introduced to the Harlem Renaissance before, make sure to include the following information:

- 1918-1930s in Harlem, New York
- With new found civic rights and social capital, the African American community developed an artistic movement
- Harlem became a black neighborhood in the early 1900s and soon it was a hotspot for African American culture and artistic production

Include any other information necessary to tie the topic into your current class discussions or upcoming units.

**Main Activity:** Select one or multiple artist from the Harlem Renaissance and compare their work to that of William S. Bullard. Source the photographs from the online collection. The following list is a set of possibilities. It is certainly not comprehensive but may provide a starting point.

- Poetry: "To One Coming North" and "If We Must Die" by Claude McKay
  - Poetry: Langston Hughes "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and "I, Too"
  - Painting: "Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery through Reconstruction" by Aaron Douglas
  - Sculpture: Augusta Savage "The Harp" or "The Pugilist"
  - Prose: Excerpts from "How it Feels to be Colored Me" by Zora Neale Hurston
  - Music: Gladys Bentley
  - Music: Louis Armstrong or Duke Ellington
  - Dance: Josephine Baker, Clips from Zouzou (1934)
  - Dance: The Nicolas Brothers Clips from Stormy Weather or clips from Lucky Number
- b. Note: Be sure to include several Bullard photographs from the internet archive. These photographs should be part of the comparison.

If possible select works that come from different mediums so that students get a chance to stretch and think about creative connections between diverse media.

Please be aware that videos and images from this artistic movement may contain controversial practices like blackface, nudity or racialized language. Consider how to best approach these subject with your students or chose media that does not include topics deemed inappropriate for the classroom.

If using computers or print outs, have the students work in small groups to analyze their works. If using a projector, have the entire class work together to answer the following questions:

2. Are there any references to life before the civil war? What kind of symbolism can you find?
  - a. Look for items like slavery, the KKK, cotton or other references to enslavement
3. Are there any references to life after the civil war?
  - a. Look for references to northern migration, political involvement or industrialization? Community building?
4. Are there themes that run throughout multiple works? How do the different media relate to each other?
5. What kind of political or social statements do these works make? How can you use something like singing or dancing to make a statement?
6. What is the purpose of these artworks? Why were they made? Was it as a political statement? To inform? To entertain?
  - a. Consider the possibility that there are multiple purposes
7. How do the Bullard photographs compare to more formal art of the time period?

If the class was divided into groups have them return and share their insights with the rest of the class.

Conclude the discussion by summarizing the different messages and purposes for the works. Explore the idea that representation and the exploration of identity and important parts of community building. Have the class discuss the importance of having an artistic presence for communities of color.

*Additional Options:*

Students could write a research paper or prepare a project/presentation about a figure in the Harlem Renaissance. Alternatively they could write a comparative essay using the classroom discussion as inspiration. There are many great authors writing during this period, so analyzing or discussing prose or poetry as a facet of historical analysis or artistic expression is also an option.

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**Main Goals:** By the end of the program the students should be able to explain the following idea:

The Harlem Renaissance served as an early way for African Americans to self-represent and celebrate their community, including ordinary people, like those in the Bullard photographs.

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**State Standards:** Massachusetts State Standards: (these will vary depending on the choice of materials, like poetry as it relates to literature versus paintings relating to fine arts)

USI.41.C, USI.41.E, USI.41.G; History Concepts and Skills 7, 8; Reading Standards for Literature 11-12: 4, 6, 9; ELA Speaking and Listening 11-12: 1, 2, 3; Arts will vary based on selected media; MA.Arts.5.8, 5.12, 6.8, 8.8, 8.10,