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| **At a Glance – “The Weary Blues”*** **Lesson Objective**: Analyze Langston Hughes’s “The Weary Blues” as an example of Harlem Renaissance Jazz Poetry.
* **In the Text:** Langston Hughes is one of the most celebrated American poets and is the most well-known poet of the Harlem Renaissance, a major American poetic movement that celebrated Black life and Black creativity. “The Weary Blues” captures the conflicting experiences of a musician in Harlem, and its style is influenced by jazz and blues music.
* **Poem(s):** “The Weary Blues” is in the public domain and is printed in the student packet.
* **Key Questions:** Questions 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 are the most important questions of the day and should not be skipped.
* **Content Advisory:** The poem “The Weary Blues” uses the term “Negro.” Teachers should name for students that this term would have been widely used in the 1920s and would not have been considered offensive at the time. During discussion, students should use “Black person or people” or “African American.”
* **Words to Watch For:**
	+ from “The Blues” Do Now
		- **tenant:** a person that pays to use another person’s property
		- **defiance:** refusing to obey someone or something
	+ from “The Harlem Renaissance” embedded text:
		- **respite:** rest or relief from something difficult or unpleasant
		- **enclaves:** areas within cities where people of a common culture or background live that are surrounded by people who are different from them
		- **disillusionment:** disappointment at discovering something is not as good as you expected
	+ from “The Weary Blues”:
		- **droning:** making a low, continuous, dull noise
		- **croon:** quiet singing or humming
		- **weary:** very tired
		- **Lenox Avenue:** a busy street in Harlem
		- **pallor:** lack of color (in an unhealthy way)
		- **rickety:** not strong or well made
	+ from “Jazz and Jazz Poetry” embedded text:
		- **countercultural:** values, ideas, and ways of acting that are different from the rest of society
		- **dissonance:** lack of agreement or harmony
		- **anti-bourgeois:** an attitude against a comfortable middle class seen as self-centered and obsessed with wealth
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| **Agenda:** * Do Now (10 minutes)
* Explicit Vocabulary (10 minutes)
* Cycle 1 – FASE Reading and Read Aloud: “The Harlem Renaissance” (15 minutes)
* Cycle 2 – Audio Recording: “The Weary Blues” (15 minutes)
* Cycle 3 – AIR: “Jazz and Jazz Poetry” (30 minutes)
* Exit Ticket (10 minutes)
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| Lesson Plan**Do Now (10 minutes)*** Give students 6-7 minutes to read the article “The Blues” and answer **Q1-Q2** independently. Then, review student responses using **Cold Call, Show Call, share out,** or a **brief discussion**.
* ***Note:*** *Teachers should play at least one of the following songs during the Do Now so students will have a sense of what early blues sounds like:*
	+ Ma Rainey – Runaway Blues: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObGCoc3d92Y>
	+ Robert Johnson – Cross Road Blues: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsB_cGdgPTo>
	+ Son House – Death Letter Blues: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdgrQoZHnNY>
* **Q1:** **What might it mean for the blues to be music of both “suffering” and “hope”?**
	+ It might mean that the music was both filled with struggle and hardship, but that the act of making the music also filled people with hope and something to enjoy together.
* **Q2: Some people still say they “have the blues” when they are feeling sad or down, and many musicians and writers put “the blues” in the titles of their work (“Black Cat Blues,” “Levee Blues,” and “Walking Blues” for example). What might these artists be trying to convey?**
	+ They might be trying to convey that the work is focused on struggle, or that their music is meant to convey strong emotions.
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| **Explicit Vocabulary Instruction (10 minutes) — Melancholy, Spontaneity*** Teach each word to students, one at a time.
* Read or ask a student to read the example sentence that includes the vocabulary word.
* Shift focus to how the picture demonstrates the word (*while projecting the image*).
* Lead Active Practice questions and ensure that students use the word in their answers.
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| **Cycle 1 (15 minutes) — “The Harlem Renaissance”*** **Read**: Use **FASE Reading** and/or **Read Aloud** to read the embedded text “The Harlem Renaissance.”
* **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q1-Q2**.
* **Discuss**: Stamp the correct answer to **Q1**, leading a **brief discussion** to address trending misconceptions if necessary. **Share out** or **Show Call** a few strong responses to **Q2**.
	+ **Q1: Which statement best describes the Harlem Renaissance?**
		- c; it refers to a cultural and artistic movement developed in Harlem by African-American migrants
	+ **Q2a: In one sentence, explain why many African Americans felt “social disillusionment” during the time of the Harlem Renaissance.**
		- Many African Americans felt “social disillusionment” during the time of the Harlem Renaissance because they continued to experience racism and discrimination even after they left the South.
	+ **Q2b: What do you think it means when the article says that African Americans “transformed social disillusionment into race pride” with their art?**
		- African Americans were able to take their social disillusionment and transform it through art into works that celebrate their history, culture, and community. They are taking their negative experiences and channeling them into incredible art.
* **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q3a**, then **Turn and Talk** to discuss **Q3b**.
* **Discuss:** Lead a **brief discussion** of **Q3**. Ask students to take notes to add to their initial thinking.
	+ **Q3: Consider the article above and what you read about the blues in the Do Now. Why might the blues have been an important influence on artists of the Harlem Renaissance?**
		- The blues was a musical style that was developed in the South, where many Black artists migrated from. It also was important because it captured the pain and suffering African Americans had experienced for 300 years, but that they continued to endure even as they moved out of the South. The blues might have captured experiences and feelings familiar to many people in Harlem.
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| **Cycle 2 (15 minutes) – “The Weary Blues”*** **Read:** Play a video of Langston Hughes reading “The Weary Blues”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uM7HSOwJw20> Langston Hughes performs this poem accompanying a jazz band, showing the marriage between music and poetry, as well as the influence of jazz and blues on poetry. Students should jot initial thoughts on the subject/speaker/audience. You might pause after listening to the first stanza and ask students to **Turn and Talk** about their initial impressions of the poem before finishing the video.
* **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q4**.
* **Discuss:** **Share out** a few ideas about **Q4**.
	+ **Q4: How would you describe the “weary blues,” according to the poem? Underline at least three lines that support your thoughts.**
		- Many possible interpretations. Some may include:
			* The feeling of being alone and unhappy
			* The feeling of being unable to be satisfied (with life)
			* The feeling of grief that is unbearable
			* The feelings of grief/pain/suffering associated with racial discrimination.
		- Students will most likely underline evidence from lines 19-30.
* **Write**: Ask students to **Turn and Talk** to respond to **Q5a**, then answer **Q5b** independently.
* **Discuss**: Lead a **brief discussion** of **Q5**. Ask students to take notes during discussion of **Q5a** and **share out** several ideas about **Q5b**.
	+ **Q5a: Where do you see musical influences in this poem? Consider things like word choice, rhythm, and rhyme.**
		- Many possible things to notice. Some may include:
			* The rhythm varies throughout the poem, with some lines that are longer, and some that are only two words long.
			* The rhymes are inconsistent and sometimes irregular, but there is also repetition of lines.
			* The poem mirrors a jazz style because of the way the lines have varied rhymes/rhythms (Hughes reads it in this way as well).
			* The word choice highlights the pain that the blues is known for.
		- ***Note:*** *Teachers should allow students time to add more thoughts in the discussion notes after students have shared to capture the fullest ideas presented by the class.*
	+ **Q5b: Why do you think the speaker of the poem chose to include lines sung by the blues singer? Try to think of more than one idea.**
		- The speaker might have chosen to do this because they are the lines that best capture the feeling of the blues.
		- The speaker might have chosen to include these lines because they felt the words were important and needed to be saved in the poem.
		- The speaker might have chosen to include these lines because they felt the same blues, and so the singer is speaking for both of them.
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| Cycle 3 (30 minutes) – “Jazz and Jazz Poetry”* **Read:** Ask students to use **AIR** to read the embedded text, “Jazz and Jazz Poetry.”
* **Watch:** Prior to answering **Q6**, teachers should play the video below. Teachers should briefly discuss how jazz is also a genre known for **spontaneity**, particularly in the way a singer will speak to the audience and sometimes even directly to the music. This video of Samuel Lightnin’ Hopkins demonstrates this spontaneity, particularly in the way he acts as if his guitar is people speaking. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbJiriEol44>
* **Write**: Ask students to respond to **Q6a**, then **Turn and Talk** for **Q6b**.
* **Discuss:** **Share out** a few strong ideas from students’ responses to **Q6**.
	+ **Q6a: The article mentions the spontaneity of jazz. Where do you see evidence of that spontaneity in “The Weary Blues”? Why do these moments seem spontaneous?**
		- The spontaneity comes out when the speaker of the poem says “O blues!” and “Sweet blues” like he’s just saying or shouting it out loud. It’s almost as if the speaker is feeling the blues himself and is responding to the blues singer.
	+ **Q6b: Why might having the blues (or listening to the blues) cause these moments of spontaneity?**
		- Having the blues might cause moments of spontaneity because the pain of having the blues can feel too much to bear, so it’s helpful to release those strong emotions.
		- These moments of spontaneity might also be celebratory, as if the music is so good (even though it’s sad) that one feels compelled to shout out about it.
* **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q7.**
* **Discuss:** Lead a **brief discussion** of **Q7**.
	+ **Q7a: When someone says they “slept like a rock,” it usually means that they went to sleep feeling satisfied after a lot of effort (like completing a hard project or winning an important game). Why do you think the blues singer might have “slept like a rock” at the end of the poem?**
		- The blues singer may have slept very well because of a great performance or because he poured his heart into his song and is satisfied after singing it.
	+ **Q7b:** **The last line also says that the singer slept like “a man that’s dead.” How is this different than sleeping “like a rock”? Why might Hughes put these ideas side by side? Consider both the similarities and the differences between the phrases.**
		- The phrases are different because sleeping like you’re dead implies that you are so tired you don’t even move. It’s a sleep of utter exhaustion. Hughes might be putting these ideas side by side to show this singer’s effort: on the one hand, it’s satisfying to perform, yet on the other it also leaves him drained of energy.
* **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q8**.
* **Discuss:** **Share out** several different responses to **Q8** to surface a variety of points of view.
	+ **Q9: Do you see “The Weary Blues” as more melancholic or more celebratory? What makes you think this?**
		- Responses will vary, but students should use the poem and the articles to support their answer.
		- Students might find it melancholic because it’s about the blues and it captures the feeling of exhaustion or sadness associate with the blues.
		- Students might find the poem celebratory because of how it was performed by Hughes, or because of the exclamations the speaker makes throughout the poem celebrating the blues singer.
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| **Exit Ticket (10 minutes)*** **Q1: Explain how “The Weary Blues” can be read as an expression of both struggle and celebration during the Harlem Renaissance. Be sure to include references to both jazz and the blues in your response.**
	+ “The Weary Blues” is an expression of struggle because it captures a strong expression of the blues. In the poem, the speaker writes down some of the lyrics that are sung, making it clear that life is hard for the blues singer with lines like, “Ain’t got nobody in this world” and “I can’t be satisfied.” This reflects some of the themes that were common from artists like Hughes during the Harlem Renaissance.
	+ “The Weary Blues” is also an expression of celebration because the poem captures the joy of hearing this music being played. Expressions like “sweet blues” show that the speaker is excited to hear this music being played which helps to celebrate it.
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