

African and African-American Traditions in Language Arts

by

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Biographical Sketch of the Author

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CONTENTS

Content	Page
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR.....	I
CONTENTS	II
INTRODUCTION	1
ORAL TRADITION.....	3
FOLKTALES.....	5
PROVERBS.....	6
RIDDLES.....	7
TALKING DRUMS.....	8
ROCK PAINTINGS	9
EGYPTIAN LITERARY ORIGINS.....	12
OLD KINGDOM.....	12
MIDDLE KINGDOM.....	12
NEW KINGDOM.....	14
BOOK OF THE DEAD.....	15
LATE KINGDOM.....	19
THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING.....	19
HIEROGLYPHS.....	20
AFRICAN WRITERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD	21
CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN LITERATURE.....	23
WORLD-RENOWNED WRITERS OF AFRICAN DESCENT	25
THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPEECH	26
FEATURES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPEECH.....	30
AFRICANISMS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE	33
SPIRITUALS	38
SURVEY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE FROM 1746 TO 1984	42
SLAVE NARRATIVES.....	47
AUTOBIOGRAPHIES	47
PERIODICALS.....	49
THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE.....	54
1930-1940.....	60
1940-1960	62
1960-1984.....	64
AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE PRIOR TO 1950	67
BLACK CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE.....	71

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

CONTEMPORARY BLACK CHILDREN'S LITERATURE (1960-1984)	74
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE 6TH - 12TH GRADE	77
ILLUSTRATORS	81
SUMMARY	82
REFERENCES	83
APPENDIXES	88
A: BACKGROUND READING FOR TEACHERS	88
B: SELECTED CHILDREN'S BIBLIOGRAPHY	89
C: AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS	95
INDEX	99

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

AFRICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN TRADITIONS IN LANGUAGE ARTS

by Joyce Braden Harris

INTRODUCTION

This survey of African-American Literature is not limited to the literary accomplishments of Africans in the U.S., although this will be the primary focus. This essay will "return to the source, "Africa, the world center of culture and learning in antiquity to pay homage to "literary ancestors" who influenced world literature and ultimately provided the cultural blueprint for African-American literature. This cultural reality is important because it provides Africans in the U.S. and the Diaspora with a frame of reference based on African traditions of excellence and achievement that have spanned thousands of years.

J. Mason Brewer describes the cultural legacy of African-Americans in his introduction to **American Negro Folklore**:

"Probably no people have been so completely the bearers of tradition as the African slave immigrants. They brought with them no material possessions to aid in preserving the arts and customs of their homeland. Yet, though empty-handed perforce, they carried in their minds and hearts a treasure of complex musical forms, dramatic speeches, and imaginative stories, which they perpetuated through the vital art of self-expressions."¹

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

The study of African-American literature has been subjected to the same myths, omissions, and distortions encountered in studying African-American History.

It is important to understand the particular impact that these misconceptions have had on the study of African-American literature:

1. Courses in African-American literature rarely establish literary origins and influences that pre-date slavery. The literature is studied solely in the context of one condition, oppression. African historical and cultural frames of reference are not acknowledged, particularly in terms of the positive impact this conditioning has had on the form and nature of Black literature.
2. Africa is commonly viewed as not having contributed much to world literature. This myth has been carried out by historians who insist that Africans, for the most part, were oral and had no written traditions. Homer, the Bible, and Greek drama came from the oral tradition, yet their literary value is not challenged. The legitimacy of the oral tradition as a valid communication system becomes an issue of who defines it. The Egyptian contribution to world literature is in truth, Africa's gift to the world. Non-Africans were not responsible for Egypt's greatness, Black Africa was, since the two were one and the same during Egypt's most productive periods.
3. African linguistic influences on the English language are not frequently included in language arts. African languages have had an influence on the English spoken by Americans, particularly in the Southern United States.
4. The worth of African-American literature is evaluated in terms of its "universality," a term which often means that the further the literature strays away from African cultural and historical references, the more acceptable it is to non-Africans based on European literary standards

5. African-American literature is studied in isolation from literature in the Diaspora in spite of the parallels that exist in themes and genres and the fact that there has been a reciprocal exchange of ideas based on shared cultural and historical realities.
6. Black literature is manipulated and controlled by white editors and publishers. "He who controls the images controls the mind." Black writers who are published generally receive little or no promotion for their works. Poor sales are then cited as reasons for not accepting manuscripts from Black authors and putting the works that are published out of print.
7. The African linguistic influences on the English spoken by African-Americans have been used to label Black children as inferior, instead of to recognize that the linguistic patterns of African-Americans form a functional language system with its own rules.

ORAL TRADITION

The oral tradition was the basis of African culture. It consisted of history, religious practices, cosmology, rituals, folktales, proverbs, riddles, games, songs, dance, magic, epic tales, myths and narratives. The African incorporated the everyday rhythms of life into his expression. African traditions of communalism, respect for elders, rituals of life and death, child rearing practices and storytelling were to later appear in the western hemisphere, having been brought by the enslaved Africans.

The importance of the oral tradition is evidenced by the important role the Griot or storyteller held in ancient Africa. The Griot recorded the customs, traditions, and history of the people. He was generally a counselor to the king, and this knowledge was passed on to another member of the "Griot" family. The Griots were "speaking documents."² Traditional Griots took an oath to teach only what the guild approved.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"For," say the Griot, "all true learning should be a secret."³ The Egyptian Mysteries System which also swore its initiates to secrecy and prohibited them from writing down its teachings is another example of the cultural unity of traditional African institutions.

The epic story of **Sundiata, King of Mali**, as told in the words of the Griot Mamadou Kouyate, can be used in the classroom for all grades. The history begins by discussing the first kings of Mali. In the words of the Griot, "Listen then, sons of Mali, children of the Black people, listen to my words, for I am going to tell you of Sundiata, the father of the Bright Country, of the savanna land, the ancestor of those who draw the bow, the master of a hundred vanquished kings."⁴ The role of Egyptian wise men was similar to the Griot; they orally documented Egypt's culture and history; priests and scribes recorded these oral presentations.

Western (White) historians have not accepted the African oral tradition as a legitimate and effective system of documenting history. African history that was preserved orally as opposed to being written down is therefore viewed as inferior and invalid. Surely, written records are useful, but to deny a people's history because its preservation was done orally instead of written, suggests that there are other dynamics defining the legitimacy of the oral tradition, namely Western attitudes toward literacy and the presumed superiority of the written over the spoken word. Author Clyde Taylor, who has written extensively on literacy, offers this analysis:

"The tendency of writing to fix or freeze speech has in the West extended towards a fixation of the universe of human discourse itself. Any effort to discuss human behavior outside of the grid of accumulated categories and definition meets with withering

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

resistance. Under this cognitive system, dominated by alphabetic linearity, the interconnected pulsations of expressive culture are imprisoned or exiled to a perpetual underground"⁵.

FOLKTALES

The folktale is the most common form of oral literature in Africa. Storytelling sessions were entertaining and enhanced by audience participation. Narrators used folktales to teach the group's values, accepted behaviors and beliefs. The most popular folktale character from African literature is Kweku Ananse, of West Africa, more fondly known as Spider. In Jamaica he is called Annancy. Folklorists say that in African-American oral literature Brer Rabbit, or Bo Rabbit, is Ananse's counterpart. Brer Rabbit is the most popular figure in African-American folklore, and many of his escapades appear in many African tales.

Joyce Cooper Arkhurst helped to popularize Anansi in the 1960's with two collections: **The Adventures of Spider** and **More Adventures of Spider**. African folktales have become a very popular genre and can be used to further students' knowledge of African history, culture, values and institutions.

Several African-American writers have based their stories on African folktales containing lessons that are historically relevant to Black people. **Mother Crocodile**, by Rosa Guy, is based on a folktale by Senegalese writer Birago Diop. He learned the story as a child from Amadou Koumba, a Griot who lived in his grandmother's house. The story tells of young crocodiles who ignore their mother's warning to stay near her in the river because a war is going on and their lives could be in danger. They disobey her and

are caught in a crossfire. Their lives are saved only when one of the crocodiles recalls the words of their maternal ancestors:

"The two younger crocodiles began to cry. But the oldest thought of his mama. He remembered Dia's tales of their grandmama. He remembered Dia's tales of their great grandmama."⁶

Mother Crocodile emphasizes how the wisdom of elders was used to teach children in African communities.

PROVERBS

African proverbs are used to summarize ancestral wisdom. Proverbs are used to guide human behavior, describe human nature, explain natural occurrences, and teach basic societal beliefs. Proverbs can be used in the classroom for creative writing and to encourage critical thinking. The power of the word can be seen in these proverbs.

1. The day on which one starts out is not the time to start one's preparations (Nigeria).
2. Those who hear the ringing of only one bell hear only one thing (Ghana).
3. He who learns, teaches (Ethiopia)

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

4. By trying often, the monkey learns to jump from the tree (Cameroon).

5. If you watch your pot your food will not burn (Ghana).

Africans often use proverbs in the same way that their African-American brethren use signifying, a quick tongued response filled with wit.

Nigerian author Chinua Achebe uses proverbs in his novels to illustrate how Africans used proverbial wisdom in their struggle against colonialism. This example is from **Arrow of God**. The speaker is a village elder about to advise a young warrior:

"If the lizard of the homestead neglects to do the things for which its kind is known, it will be mistaken for the Ward of the farmland."⁷

RIDDLES

African children use riddles for entertainment in the same way that American youth tell jokes.

My father built me a house without windows.
(An egg) Ghana.

You don't need to call him to follow you. (Your shadow) Ghana.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

However, one type of riddle has the same function as all African oral literature, the preservation of African cultural values. In this category the riddles are lengthier and ask the listener to solve a problem. Respect for elders and family unity are the traditional African values expressed in this riddle from Northern Zimbabwe:

"A man and his wife went to visit their friends. On their return home they were accompanied by their respective mothers. On the road, the four were set upon by all manner of horrible creatures, lions, snakes, leopards, etc., etc. They managed to elude them and got to a river.

"There they found a canoe, but to their horror it would only hold three people. Their enemies were pressing hard upon their trail. The river was full of crocodiles; they couldn't hope to swim, only three could escape. One must die! Who was it to be? The man sacrificed his mother-in-law you say. No! His wife would not allow him. She would not desert her mother, nor he his: the elders would not forsake their children. How did they get out of their difficulty? The answer: They all sat down on the river bank and died together."⁸

In the classroom students can be given the riddle and asked to write their own solutions. This type of creative writing activity encourages students to explore their own values.

TALKING DRUMS

By varying the tone and pitch of the drum, Africans created a "language" that replicated the spoken word. Used mostly in West and Central Africa, the talking drum was used as a means of communication. This was one of the reasons why the African slave in America was forbidden to recreate the rhythm of the drum. In spite of this interference,

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

the language of the drum has survived in the speech and music of African-Americans. **Talking Drums of Africa** by Christine Price is a children's book that rhythmically explores the role of the drum in Africa.

ROCK PAINTINGS

The Bushman of Southern Africa, who may be man's oldest ancestor,⁹ related the facts about his lifestyles, religion, mythology, migration and survival by painting them on rocks. These rock paintings, many which date back milleniums ago documented the daily activities of the Bushman. According to modern observers these rocks are "the open page of knowledge," and on them ". . . a Bushman artist told a story, half terror, half comedy, as readily comprehensible now as it was hundreds of years ago when he related it with his brush."¹⁰

The rock paintings also lead us to speculate on the possible influence the Bushman may have had on Egypt. Cheikh Anta Diop in his classic work, **African Origin of Civilization**, cites evidence that the Bushman type migrated north and may have inhabited Europe as far back as 40,000 B.C.

In 1814 Dr. W.H. Bleeker studied the folklore symbolized in the rocks and concluded that ". . . these animal headed Bushman represented sorcerers. He found them somewhat reminiscent of the Egyptian mythological representations in which animal heads were placed on human bodies."¹¹ Dr. Bleeker's observation hints at the possible Bushman influence on Egyptian mythology. Dr. Bleeker also describes the possible influence of the Bushman on other civilizations:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

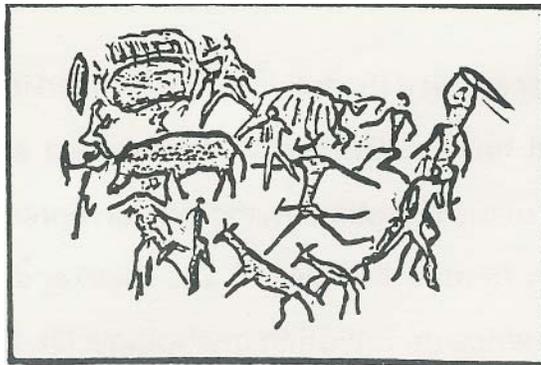
"To be sure there is much in his art astonishingly similar to the rock paintings in Eastern Spain, North Africa, and the Sahara. One suspects that the Bushmen Forebearers must have had contact with people to the North."¹²

Further evidence of contact between Bushmen and Egyptians is documented during the Sixth Dynasty (ca. 2300 B.C.) in the tomb of Harkhuf where the following narrative is inscribed:

"Hurry and bring with you this pygmy whom
youbrought from the land of the horizon-dwellers."¹³

Telling stories on rock may have originated in Southern Africa. The similarities and functions are too close to be "accidental." The Bushman, due to his lifestyle, recorded his story on rock. He used no system of writing as we know it. The Egyptians added written inscriptions to their rock art, giving new meaning to the original form.

Rock art as early literature can be explored in the classroom by showing students some of the drawings and asking them to produce written narratives. **African Genesis** by Leo Frobenius is an excellent collection of 29 folktales drawn from the folklore represented by this art. Reproductions of the petroglyphs accompany much of the text.



Rock art of the Wahungwe of Southern Zimbabwe portrays **The Hunter**.¹⁴

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

African systems of communication were *very* functional, and their usefulness rests largely on our understanding of their effectiveness for Africans and on the frame of reference we use to assess their validity. Clearly, for the African whom these systems worked, there was nothing inferior about them.

EGYPTIAN LITERARY ORIGINS

OLD KINGDOM

One of the earliest Egyptian literary forms was the Offering List which consisted of the material items needed for a safe and happy afterlife. This form later changed into the Prayer for Offerings which was most likely written down from oral tradition.

Autobiographies were a common literary genre in Egypt. They were self-proclaiming epitaphs used to prepare their subjects for spiritual immortality; they were similar to the praise-songs used in funeral rituals and ceremonial occasions in other parts of Africa. Egyptian autobiography, like folklore, mirrored the accepted standards and beliefs of African culture. The **Instructions in Wisdom** were unified teachings, based on societal codes of behavior that derived from the Egyptian's deep spirituality. The **Instructions** were always attributed to any one of Egypt's wise men such as **The Instruction of Ptahhotep**. The Pyramid Texts were written to prepare royalty for the journey after death.

MIDDLE KINGDOM

Didactic or Wisdom Literature began to appear during the Middle Kingdom. The primary thrust of this literature was admonishment or prophecy. **The Prophecies of Neferti** (Fourth Dynasty) were not only prophetic but historical, as can be seen in this excerpt describing the unification of upper and lower Egypt by Menes:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"Then a king will come from the South, Ameny, the justified, by name, Son of a woman of Ta-Seti, child of upper Egypt. He will take the white crown, He will wear the red crown; He will join the Two Mighty Ones."¹⁵

Flashback is the literary device used here since the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt had taken place five hundred years earlier (3100 B.C.).

This prophecy, which was orally delivered to the king, is similar to the epic histories told by the Griots of West Africa. Prophecy as a literary genre was later to become a significant part of the Hebrew religion. Egyptologist James H. Breasted states:

". . . We cannot resist the conclusion that it furnished the Hebrew prophets with the form and to a surprising extent also with the content of Messianic Prophecy."¹⁶

The stela, a stone monument that included a short autobiography along with an offering prayer, was popularized during this period. Its use was not restricted to royalty.

The **Royal Instructions** began to appear during this time. They consisted of advice from the king to his successor. Coffin texts which were based on the royal Pyramid texts were used by non-royalty. Hymns, songs, prose tales and poetry flowered during this period. Perhaps the most interesting creation during this time was **The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor**, which has been described as the prototype for the classic tale, **Sinbad the Sailor**. Other popular tales of this period were **The Story of Sinuhe** and **Tale of the Eloquent Peasant**.

NEW KINGDOM

The Eighteenth Dynasty with its legendary kings and queens, Ahmose, Akhenaten, Hatshepsut, and Thutmose to name a few, heralded a new beginning for Egypt with the expulsion of the Hyksos by Ahmose. Two new genres appeared during this period, school texts and romantic poetry. The school texts included instructions on how to be a scribe and teachings on the immortality of the writer as written in the Papyrus Chester Beatty:

"If you but do this, you are versed in writings. As to those learned Scribes, of the time that came after the gods, they who foretold the future, their names have become everlasting, while they departed, having finished their lives, and all their Kin are forgotten."¹⁷

Akhenaten, who introduced monotheism to Egypt, is credited with this beautifully written **Hymn to the Sun**. It begins:

"Your brighter hue gives life to hearts, When you fill the Two Lands with your love. August God who fashioned himself, Who made every land, created what is in it, All peoples, herds and flocks, All trees that grow from soil; They live when you dawn for them, You are mother and father of all that you made."¹⁸

Akhenaten's hymns to Aten may have provided the theme for a 1972 children's book **And the Sun God Said That's Hip**. Written in Black English, the book describes how the Sun God created the earth:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"He had smiled at the trees
blinked to the breeze
whistled for the tides
and made the rain close his eyes."¹⁹

Although this book is geared to illustrate the resemblance to ancient Egyptian literary sources, the author does not recommend its use in the classroom. Some of the language is not appropriate for young readers.

Romantic verses were written with the loved one referred to as brother or sister:

"My brother torments my heart with his
voice, He makes sickness take hold of me;
He is neighbor to my mother's house,
And I cannot go to him! Mother is right in
charging him thus;
'Give up seeing her!'
It pains my heart to think of him, I am
possessed by love of him, truly he is
a foolish one, but I resemble him."²⁰

Royal monumental inscriptions of this period included the Obelisk Inscriptions of Queen Hatshepsut of the Eighteenth Dynasty.

BOOK OF THE DEAD

The **Book of the Coming Forth Into Day, To Live After Death**, more commonly called the **Book of the Dead** is a group of papyri that derived their name because they were found buried with the dead. The purpose of these instructions was to guide the departed into a safe and peaceful journey into the afterlife as described in Chapter 17 of the **Theban Recension**:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"Beginning of the elevations, glorifications of the going out, of the descent into the burial ground. To come forth into day, to make all the metamorphoses that one desires ... to come forth as a living soul, after death."²¹

The **Book of the Dead** was a synthesis of beliefs and teachings based on thousands of years of Egyptian written and oral traditions.

The **Pyramid Texts**, according to Budge, are the earliest form of the **Book of the Dead** and the oldest edition was discovered in the tomb of an Eleventh Dynasty queen. The Theban Recension, attributed to the Eighteenth Dynasty, and the later Saite Recension (Twenty-Sixth Dynasty) are the Books of the Dead most commonly studied. The **Papyrus of Ani**, seventy-eight feet long, is the longest and most complete text in this category.

The **Protestations of Innocence** also called **The Negative Confessions** were the deceased person's affirmation that he had lived a good life on earth and was worthy of immortality. The Ten Commandments which appear much later in history are very similar in content to **The Negative Confessions**.

Protestation of Innocence	Ten Commandments
I am not one who telleth lies instead of truth I am not a murderer I am not an adulterer I have not robbed the poor. ²²	Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor Thou shalt not kill Thou shalt not commit adultery Thou shalt not steal.

The inscription of Nefer-Seshem-Re of the Sixth Dynasty provides further evidence of the African origins of the Ten Commandments:

I respected my father, I pleased my mother.²³ (Honor thy father and mother.)

The influence of the **Book of the Dead** on major world religions is further acknowledged:

"Some of the parts of the **Book of the Dead** do remind us of the very moving grandeur of the Hebrew Psalms; indeed the Jewish holy books were influenced to some extent by the religious writings of Egypt."²⁴

Certain inscriptions from the tomb of Petosiris (350 B.C.) resemble parts of the

Egyptian	Psalm 23
<p>He who walks in thy path, he will not falter: since I have been on earth and until this day, when I have come to the perfect regions, there has been found no fault in me.</p> <p>If I have come here to the city of eternity, it is because I have done good on earth, and that my heart has rejoiced in the path of the Lord, from my infancy to this day. Every night the spirit of God was in my soul, and at dawn I did as he willed. I practiced justice, I detested evil. I had no dealings with those who ignored the spirit of the Lord. I did all this thinking that I would come to God after my death, and because I knew that the day would come when the Lords of Justice would make the final division, on the day of Judgment ...</p> <p>Oh you living, I will have you know the will of the Lord. I will guide you to the path of life, the good path of those who obey God: Happy is he whose heart leads him toward it. He whose heart is firm in the path of the Lord, secure is his existence on earth. He who has in his soul a great fear of the Lord great is his happiness on earth.²⁵</p>	<p>He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.</p> <p>Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.</p> <p>Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.</p> <p>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.</p>

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

LATE KINGDOM

The Shabaka Stone commissioned by King Shabaka of the Twenty-Fifth (Nubian) Dynasty was a religious treatise that utilized earlier Egyptian greatness as a source of inspiration for the future. The Victory Stela of King Pianki (Piye) describes this African King's conquest of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Egypt from this point on went through a series of transitions. Foreign intruders, such as the Persians, Romans, and Greek settlers, began to change the nature of this great African civilization. However, Egypt's gift to world literature and religion had already been indelibly imprinted on world civilization. Students in grades 7-12 should read **Her-Bak, The Living Face of Ancient Egypt** by Isha Schwaller de Lubicz. The author recreates the education of a young boy in the "Inner Temple" of Egypt. The two-volume narrative is drawn from the author's knowledge of Egyptian history and philosophy and vividly recreates life in ancient Egypt. Ron **Karenga's Selections from the Husia, Sacred Wisdom of Ancient Egypt**, (1984) is recommended for use as a classroom text because of its readability. Karenga has done a superb job of translating Egyptian literature into everyday language. He has also undertaken the long overdue task of identifying the literary texts by the names of their original creators or those whom they were written for, rather than referring to them by the names of the Europeans who recovered them.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING

The Africans who lived along the Nile River provided the world with a rich and highly developed civilization. The development of writing represented a major milestone in

world history. Recent archaeological evidence indicates that much of what we believe originated in Egypt existed in Nubia, also called Ta-Seti (Land of the Bow) several thousand years before the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt. At a site along the Sudan and Egyptian border called Qustul, evidence of pharaonic-type dynasties that pre-date Egypt's first dynasty by about 2,500 years have been discovered.²⁶ Hieroglyphs were found inscribed on tombs which appear to have been the prototype for Egyptian inscriptions.

What then was the Egyptian contribution to writing if Africans in Nubia and even further South provided the basic foundations for writing? The Nile Valley Africans initially inscribed their writings on stone, as did the Nubians, but this was a cumbersome process and they began to search for more practical writing materials. Papyrus plants that grew along the Nile were pounded into thin sheets, and dried in the sun to form a linen-type writing surface. Reeds that grew along the Nile were sharpened and used as pens. The juices from the indigo plant were used as ink. The Egyptians discovered paper, pen, and ink. Their prolific use of these items has contributed to our understanding of the Egyptian's vast knowledge.

HIEROGLYPHS

There were three types of hieroglyphs used by the Egyptians. Early hieroglyphs (Sacred Writings) were laboriously prepared, chiseled on stone monuments to record sacred texts. **Hieratic** Script was a stylized version of hieroglyphs used by the learned class of Egyptians, mostly by priests. This abbreviated script began to appear during the latter part of the Old Kingdom, and its use marked the difference between the peasant and literate classes.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Demotic script, a cursive form of hieroglyphs, came into use during the New Kingdom. Reading Egyptian hieroglyphs remained a mystery until 1821, when Champollion deciphered the Rosetta Stone, found in the Nile River delta. Champollion was able to unlock the key to Egyptian writings because this black tablet contained the same decree written in hieroglyphic inscription, demotic script and Greek translations.

AFRICAN WRITERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

Publius Terentius Afer, Terence the African, lived in Rome about 170 B.C. He was @ slave whose literary abilities prompted his master to free him. Terence was a poet, and wrote six comedies: **The Brothers, The Self Avenger, Andria, Phormio, The Mother in Law** and **The Eunuch**. He has been called the greatest "Latin" stylist that ever lived.

Aesop lived in Greece in the Sixth Century B.C. His name Aesop was derived from the Greek word Ethiop, which meant sunburned face. Ethiopia means land of the sunburned faces. Aesop's fables are well known throughout the world for their wit and wisdom.²⁷

West Africa

The empires of Ghana, Songhay, Mali, and Kanem-Bornu became centers of trade and culture during West Africa's Golden Age (700-1800 A.D.). Universities in Gao, Jenne, and Timbuktu were world centers of learning. Courses included "astronomy,

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

mathematics, ethnography, medicine, hygiene, philosophy, logic, prosody, diction, elocution, rhetoric and music."²⁸ Felix DuBois, the French author of **Timbuctoo the Mysterious**, wrote that the University of Sankore at Timbuktu with its African scholars enjoyed popularity and respect in many parts of Europe. Ahmed Baba, professor and last chancellor at the University of Sankore in Timbuktu, is credited with having written over forty books. He also had a library collection of over 1600 books.

Abd Al-Rahman Al-Sadi, Sudanese scholar, wrote the **Tarikh-es-Sudan** (History of the Sudan) in the 17th century. Al-Sadi's scholarly study tells of the interaction between ancient Egypt and early West African empires. Mahmud Kati, another Sudanese scholar, wrote **Tarikh al-Fettach**. African scholars of this period bore Arabic names due to the heavy influence of the Islamic religion.

The oral tradition provides us with much of the history of the Central Sudan. The Kano Chronicle is an oral collection of Hausa traditions tracing the history of Kanem-Bornu. The Zaria Chronicle details the exploits of Queen Amina of Sixteenth Century Nigeria. From Amina's practice of building walls comes the saying, "Ya dade Kamar Ganuwar Amina," (it has lasted as long as Amina's wall), that is, "It is as old as the hills."²⁹

West Africa, with its universities, libraries, learned men, and strong oral tradition was the home of many of the Africans who were kidnapped and transported to America. John Henrik Clarke says of this West African legacy:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"The forefathers of the Africans who eventually became slaves in the United States lived in a society where university life was fairly common and scholars were beheld with reverence."

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN LITERATURE

The African influence on world literature is clearly seen in ancient Egypt and from the flourishing intellectual centers of West Africa. Contemporary African writers have contributed much to the reclamation of African historical and cultural identity for Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora. Okello Oculi, an East African poet writes in one of his poems, "Malak":

"We have a right to remember and a duty to our memories and theirs for we have been taken for granted."

Contemporary African writers have been successful because of their skill in transforming oral culture into literary forms. Chinua Achebe, Nigerian author of **Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, Arrow of God and A Man of the People**, incorporates the wisdom and wit of African proverbs throughout his novels. His stories provide students with an excellent opportunity to explore the use of African proverbs as they are used in conversation.

Many of the modern African authors write about the destructive impact of colonialism on traditional African institutions, culture, and values. Injustice, inequality, detentions, spying, land ownership, and education are the major themes. These popular African writers expose the conditions brought about by colonialism Ayi Kwei Armah (Ghana), **The Beatyful Ones Are Not Yet Born** and Two Thousand Seasons; Ngugi

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Wa Thiongo (Kenya) **Weep Not Child**; and Ezekiel Mphahlele (South Africa) **Down Second Avenue**. Armah's **Two Thousand Seasons** is an historical narrative written in a prose style. Hoyt W. Fuller, literary critic and scholar describes the importance of this monumental work:

"In Ayi Kwei Armah, those who have been seeking the perfect union of Afro-centric consciousness, historical relevance and literary excellence have found their living synthesis. This quiet scholar and humanist writes with such lyric grace and intelligence that the reader is swept along in the power and beauty of the narrative, little realizing at first that the writer is subtly teaching the ancient, complex, violent, and glorious story of Africa and of all of us who sprang from her."³¹

This work is excellent for use in high school literature classes.

Several non-fiction works by African writers show the effects of colonialism on contemporary Africans. Written as essays, autobiographies or as collections of letters these include: Steve Biko (South Africa) **I Write What I Like**, Wole Soyinka (Nigeria) **The Man Died**, Oginga Odinga (Kenya) **Not Yet Uhuru** and Nelson Mandela (South Africa) **No Easy Walk to Freedom**. The use of the oral tradition in African literature appears to have provided African writers with inspiration and substance.

West African poets joined with Africans in the Diaspora and used the theme of Negritude, a phrase coined by Aime Cesaire of Martinique as a rallying point for asserting their uniqueness on a global scale. Negritude inspired Africans whose lives had been impacted by French colonialism in the same way that "Black Nationalism" influenced African-Americans.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

The most popular Negritude writers include: Leopold Senghor, Birago Diop, David Diop (Senegal); Jacques Roumain, Rene Depestre, Leon Laleau (Haiti); Aime Cesaire (Martinique); Guy Tirolien (Guadeloupe); Leon Damas and Rene Maran (French Guiana) and Bernard Dadie (Ivory Coast).

WORLD-RENOWNED WRITERS OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Alexander S. Pushkin (1799-1837) was the first writer to use the Russian language and from it create a national literature. Popularly called the "Father of Russian Literature," Pushkin was of African ancestry. His great-grandfather Abraham Hannibal was a descendant of Hannibal, the great African military strategist from Carthage. Before Pushkin, French was the language used by Russia's educated and elite, while the serfs spoke Russian. Pushkin successfully incorporated Russian oral and folk culture into his poetry and at age fifteen became Russia's leading poet.

He attempted to write an historical novel about his great-grandfather entitled **Peter the Great's Negro** but never completed it. Freedom and the pursuit of liberty were major themes in his poetry. He delivered this message to the Russian serf in Ode to Liberty:

"Oh shake and shiver tyrants of the world,
But lend an ear ye fallen slaves,
Gain courage and rise!"³²

Pushkin also commented on slavery in America:

"He never forgot his ancestry, in a letter to Prince Viasemski about the Greek independence he wrote (June 1824): 'it is permissible to judge the Greek question like that of my Negro brethren, desiring for both deliverance from an intolerable slavery.'"³³

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Alexandre Dumas, Pere (father), (1802-1870) was the grandson of Marie Dumas of Santo Domingo (Haiti) and a French nobleman. His father was the famous General Dumas. Dumas, Pere, was a prolific writer who wrote over 300 books and 25 plays. His most famous novels include: **The Three Musketeers, The Count of Monte Cristo, The Black Tulip, and Chevalier de Maison Rouge**. Dumas, Pere, like Pushkin, spoke out against slavery and acknowledges his African ancestry in a letter written to a fellow opponent of slavery:

"There may even be relatives of mine who even now are forming part of the cargoes of slave vessels."³⁴

Alexandre Dumas, Fils (son), (1824-1890) changed French theatre from frivolous romance and oratory to meaningful portrayals of serious and purposeful thought. He won France's highest literary honors and was elected president of the prestigious French Academy.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPEECH

When the enslaved Africans arrived in America, the dehumanization process that began with their brutal kidnapping and passage from Africa gained momentum. Systematic attempts to destroy African humanity, history, and culture shaped race relations in America and the Western world for generations to come.

Africans were forbidden to speak in their traditional languages. This had the effect of making it very difficult for Africans to sustain their history and culture. Language is, as Cheikh Anta Diop says, "the primary transmitter of culture." Frantz Fanon describes how language is used to maintain a master/slave relationship:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"Every colonized people - in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural Standards."³⁵

The physical atrocities of slavery must have seemed that much more intense for the African who did not understand what was being communicated to him and who was then beaten for not responding to the strange utterances of the slave owners. Students can explore the anguish and confusion that resulted from being unable to understand English by studying the history of Joseph Cinque and the Amistad Mutiny.³⁶ Cinque commandeered a slave ship, the Amistad, that was enroute to America and attempted to return to his African homeland. Since Cinque did not understand the language, he was given incorrect directions by one of the ship's mates that steered him to America instead. Cinque and his countrymen were jailed and put on trial. He later regained his freedom and was sent back to Africa. Since much of the brutality leveled against the African occurred because he did not understand what was being communicated to him, he must have felt that learning the language would lessen the severity of the treatment he received from his oppressors. This, of course, was not true and from the slave owners' perspective, the African's learning of the language would provide them with another weapon to use for further dehumanization and to shape a slave mentality that defined African people as inferior. This point is important because A shaped attitudes toward Africans throughout the world!

Forbidden to use their traditional languages, the Africans, having come from a historical tradition of innovators and creators, used this inherited genius as they struggled to learn English. The African had in his speech the rhythm of his ancestors, and this psycholinguistic memory shaped the form and nature of Black speech.

Turner demonstrates the unity of African languages by comparing numeral words from the Mandingo languages.

	One	Two	Three
Malinke	Kilin	Fula	Ta
Kankanka	Kelen	Fila	Tan
Jalunka	Kelen	Fila	Tan
Mandinka	Kilin	Fula	Tan ³⁷

Winifred Vass illustrates this same linguistic unity in the Bantu Speaking Heritage of the United States, using the languages of the "Bantu Nucleus," Kongo, Lwena, Luba-Kasai, Luba-Katanga, Bemba, Ila, Rundi, and Swahili. Vass used these languages since Africans were taken from the interior regions of Central Africa and the Southwestern coastal areas after West Africa was ravaged. Vass discovered that there are over two hundred words that are common to these "Bantu" languages. It should be pointed out that "Bantu" is a European designation. There has never been a community of people in Africa who called themselves Bantus. The term is being used here to be consistent with Ms. Vass' work.

Although the Africans could not communicate in one common tongue, they discovered that there were similarities in the rhythms, gestures and movements they created. According to Clyde Taylor, this shared cultural orientation represented the Africans' early attempts to create a language:

" ... Among the cultural baggage that survived the Middle Passage, I would argue, were African 'mythophonics' highly charged symbolizations in **Music** and **Language** of entire cultural outlooks. Mythophonic in character, then, would be those orientatives to speech, music, dance and non-verbal communication that could survive that tortured passage of flesh" and, as best they could, reconstitute in the new world the values and perspectives of the old."³⁸

This cultural predisposition resulted in a speech pattern that sounded almost musical. Rap music, currently popularized by African-American "rappers", is an excellent example of this. The slave owners thought that the music making of the slaves meant that they were adapting to their condition. Little did they know that the music-making was a veiled attempt to communicate.

As the African mimicked the language of the oppressor, orientations from both languages were combined. The enslaved Africans created a language based on "Africanity," a term used by Wade Nobles of the Fanon Research and Development Institute in Oakland, California, to describe African influences. Out of necessity the African was forced to learn English, but he did not come to America as a mute! This new linguistic imperative resulted in an Africanized form of the English language. Learning English was the African's new cultural reality. After studying the impact learning colonial languages had on Africans in Martinique and Algeria, Fanon concluded:

"To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture."³⁹

The enslaved African's view of the world and particularly of himself and his role in this "new" world would for many years speakbe distorted as a result of learning English.

The same held true for Africans in other parts of the Western hemisphere as well as on the African continent.

FEATURES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN SPEECH

The following list of African-American speech characteristics is based on the research of noted psychologist Dr. Na'im Akbar.

Communication Styles of the African-American Child:

- Is highly affective.

- Uses language requiring a wide use of many coined interjections (sometimes profanity).

- Expresses herself/himself through considerable body language.

- Relies on words that depend upon context for meaning and that have little meaning in themselves.

- Prefers using expressions that have meaning connotations.

- Adopts a systematic use of nuances of intonation and body language, such as eye movement and positioning.

- Prefers oral-aural modalities for learning communication.

- Is highly sensitive to others' nonverbal cues.
- Seeks to be people oriented.
- Is sociocentric.
- Uses internal cues for problem solving.
- Feels highly empathetic.
- Likes spontaneity.
- Adapts rapidly to novel stimuli.⁴⁰

Teachers who acknowledge and accept the legitimacy of the Black child's linguistic development can use this knowledge to elicit maximum performance from Black children in the classroom. For example, instruction and assignments that utilize the oral-aural modality may motivate Black children to become more involved in the learning process, as opposed to relying solely on visual modes.

The skillful manipulation of voice to give meaning to words and ideas and deep spirituality formed the basis of African languages. The languages spoken by the Africans brought to America were for the most part tonal. Word definitions and usage were determined by the tone and stress of the voice as the word was spoken. A contemporary example of this is in the use of the word **bad**, which can

be an adjective depending on the tone in which it is used. Akbar refers to this as "grammatical maneuvering." This characteristic of African-American speech has crossed over into the speech of other Americans, a contemporary example of the "Bantu" dynamic. This ability to manipulate and obscure word meanings has helped to produce a communication system among Blacks that may not be readily comprehensible to non-Blacks.

Non-verbal communication by African-Americans is for some observers equivalent to a "highly exquisite form of pantomime."⁴¹ Black people use body language to convey what the English language cannot. Hand gestures, eye movements, head shaking and entire body movements underscore, interpret and add meaning to words. Rolling or cutting of the eyes is an example of non-verbal communication that Black people use handily. Hollywood picked up on this and many early Black film stars were required to roll their eyes to elicit laughter from audiences.

Other examples of this can be seen in the break-dancing routines that were reintroduced to America in the early 1980's by Black and Hispanic youth from Harlem and the Bronx in New York. The call and response modality of this dance allows us to see how powerful non-verbal exchanges can be. The addition of rhythm (music) provides the breakers with additional "messages" demonstrating how music and body language are combined into an effective communication mode. Break-dancing as a social dance utilizing several dancers mimicking and showing their best is reminiscent of African traditional dances.

The cultural blueprint for the development of African-American language is African.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Specific examples of this are:

1. Social and communal aspects, particularly the people orientation.
2. Use of the voice to denote word meanings.
3. Simultaneous use of several different modalities to communicate.

The linguistic history of African-Americans was not destroyed during slavery, only dimmed. Language expressions and features still bear resemblances to their original sources.

AFRICANISMS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Lorenzo Turner's classic work, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949), was the first comprehensive study of the extent to which African languages influenced the English language. Gullah is spoken primarily by African descendants in the Southeastern Coastal U.S. The Georgia Sea Islands are perhaps the area most often studied. Turner presents over four thousand Gullah words with African origins. He also refuted much of the earlier research which concluded that the Gullah dialect was either baby talk or that it derived from rural British dialects. Turner successfully researched this subject because he respected the people and understood the African languages and culture these languages represented. Respondents trusted him because he did not approach them with the cultural arrogance displayed by many white researchers, who often gathered information without their knowledge or consent. Turner's study is based on linguistic concepts and is therefore very detailed in its discussion of word phonology,

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

etymology, syntax, and morphology. Included in the book are Gullah narratives which provide insight on religion, slavery, storytelling and songs.

Vass cites convincing evidence of the cultural transfer that occurred as Africans from the Bantu language areas came into contact with English. The Bantu languages, as pointed out earlier, share a linguistic unity. This grouping is similar to the unity shared by the "Romance" languages of Europe. Vass used Tshiluba (Luba Kasai) as the basis of her monograph. Her major thesis is that the Bantu languages are characterized by what she describes as the Bantu Dynamic:

"Bantu speech had an amazing way of adopting and adapting each new cultural group that it contacted as it spread over the African sub-continent."⁴²

This Bantu dynamic has had a far greater influence on the English language than we realize, as Vass points out:

"The ability to move in on a culture, absorb it and change its language ceased to be limited to the African continent when the slave trade started. Bantu-speaking slaves, bearers of this ethnic and cultural speech trait, carried it with them in the new world."⁴³

With the information provided by Turner and Vass, it is evident that African languages changed and influenced the English language as can be seen in the following examples:

1. Place - Names

These towns were selected because their meanings may explain their

particular historical significance -- Chumukla (Florida) -- from "tshiumukila" (a motive for leaving, for getting out, for moving on to another place.)⁴⁴

Echota (Georgia) - from "a tshiota; of the clan; belonging to the extended family group."⁴⁵

2. Songs - Lubilu - Lubila. Quickly - (with a) Shout

Another common Southern folkgame, "I put my right hand in; I take my right hand out," has a chorus with the words: "Here we go **looby-loo**; here we go **looby la**; Here we go **looby-loo**; all on a Saturday night!"

Both of these Luba words, lubilu (quickly, in a hurry) and lubila (a shout) are words still in common usage in the Republic of Zaire.

"Here we go **quickly**; here we go with a shout!
Here we go **quickly**; all on a Saturday night!"⁴⁶

3. Vocabulary

Nana - grandmother

Tota - to tote

Nyambi - yam

Nguba - goober (peanut)

Tshinji - chinch (bug)

gumbo - Kingumbo, okra⁴⁷

Further evidence is available in the Southern United States where the language spoken has characteristic features of African languages such as tonality and rhythm. James Weldon Johnson commented on the Southern dialect in the early 1900's:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"In the South all white people, men, women, and children, understand the dialect without any show of difficulty. Indeed, the English spoken by the whites does not differ, in some respects from the dialect, so great has been the influence of this soft, indolent speech of the Negro."⁴⁸

The differences in speech patterns between Southern white and Black people is far less than that of Northern whites and Blacks. This is explained by the closer proximity the Southern white had to the African when the Africans first arrived in the U.S. and the impact the newly arrived Africans had on the spoken language of Southern whites.

Dillard also offers evidence of the language transference between the African and Southern whites. The analogy is made that this cultural linguistic exchange produced Southern white dialect in the same way that Africans produced Black English.⁴⁹

Observations made by whites attest to the concern over this obvious change in the speech of Southern whites:

"Southern speech is clipped, softened, and broadened by the Negro admixture. The child learns its language from its Negro nurse, servants, and playmates, and this not unpleasant patois is never quite eradicated."⁵⁰

The alarm triggered by this observation is best expressed by Fanny Kemble in 1839:

"... The children of the owners, brought up among them (the slaves) acquire their Negro mode of talking - slavish speech. Surely it is - and it is distinctly perceptible in the utterances of all Southerners, par-

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

particularly of the women, whose avocations, taking them less from home, are less favorable to their throwing off this ignoble trick of pronunciation than the varied occupation and the more extended and promiscuous business relations of men."⁵¹

Dillard suggests that many Southern whites were bi-dialectal, able to use Black dialect as well as standard English. Students can research the origins and meanings of African words in the English language in order to develop an appreciation of the contributions African-Americans have made to the English language.

African-American language is very expressive and since its development has been used to articulate the emotions and aspirations of the group. Black speech has a collective orientation based on African communal values. Speakers who are able to use the rhythms of the ancestors to verbalize the Black condition become folk heroes to African-Americans. Jesse Jackson, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. are examples of this. The recorded speeches of these modern day prophets should be listened to so students can appreciate and recognize the continuity of the African oral tradition. The eloquent and moving speech by the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson at the 1984 Democratic National Convention is destined to become a Black historical "document" in the spirit of the African oratorical tradition along with Martin L. King's "I Have a Dream!"

J.L. Dillard and Geneva Smitherman have written about the syntax, structure, and style of Black English. Teachers interested in further exploring this should consult these sources.⁵²

Black literature provides us with a wealth of information to trace the development

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

and use of Black speech. The transition from the dialect speech of Dunbar's characters to the Harlem Renaissance writers' use of the folk language is an example of how Black literature can be used to study Black language.

Students who are taught that there are cultural and historical reasons that account for the different ways that people speak can begin to understand that differences are not synonymous with inferiority. This message can only be conveyed if teachers acknowledge and teach these differences with the highest degree of respect and understanding. Children will develop respect and tolerance for differences only if they see these same qualities being practiced by those who are seen as role models.

SPIRITUALS

The enslaved Africans expressed their sorrow, frustration, and anger in a collective voice - the spirituals., The African had within him a cultural predisposition to oral poetry from centuries old African praise songs. Transplanted African voices and spirituality transformed oral poetry into melodic and rhythmic expressions of an oppressed people with visions of freedom.

The spirituals were structurally very similar to African songs, especially in the call and response mode. James Weldon Johnson studied the similarities between African and African-American song in **The Book of American Negro Spirituals** (1925):

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Sultan Praise Song (Bornou)

Give flesh to the hyenas at daybreak -
 Oh, the broad spears!
The spear of the Sultan is the broadest -
 Oh, the broad spears!
I behold thee now, I desire to see none other.
 Oh, the broad spears!

This song is from an African Folktale. The Story of Tangalimlibo:

It is crying, it is crying,
 Sihamba Ngenyanga
The child of the walker by moonlight,
 Sihamba Ngenyanga
It was done intentionally by people whose names cannot be mentioned
 Sihamba Ngenyanga

Finally, this African-American spiritual:

Oh de Ribber of Jordan is deep and wide,
One mo' ribber to cross.
I don't know how to get on de other side,
One mo' ribber to cross.
Oh you got Jesus hold him fast,
One mo' ribber to cross.⁵³

W.E.B. DuBois describes how his great-great-grandmother, a slave, sang to comfort her child and how this was passed on:

"The child sang it to his children and they to their children's children, and so two hundred years it has travelled down to us and we sing it to our children, knowing as little as our fathers what its words may mean, but knowing well the meaning of its music."⁵⁴

In this way the character of African song survived in America and retained some of its original form and spirit.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

The spirituals remained confined to American soil until 1871 when the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a group of eleven singers, was formed to raise money for Fisk School (University). They took the music of Black people to the world stage performing before England's Queen Victoria, German royalty and in American concert halls. The spirituals have been described as the only authentic American Indian music. W.E.B. DuBois says of the spirituals:

"And so by fateful chance the Negro folk-song - the rhythmic cry of the slave - stands today not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas."⁵⁵

The spirituals should also be studied as poetry, since many of them were in fact "poetic" in form.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

**SURVEY OF
AFRICAN-AMERICAN
LITERATURE
1746-1984**

Survey of African-American Literature from 1746 to 1984

Phillis Wheatley was kidnapped from Senegal in 1760 when she was seven or eight years old. John Wheatley of Boston purchased her and she was given the family surname. According to Wheatley, Phillis learned to read and write in a short time and published her first poem, "An Elegiac Poem on the Death of George Whitefield" in 1770. Her only book, **Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral**, was first published in London (1773) and later in America (1786). It was the first book published by an African-American woman. Its authenticity was sworn to by eighteen prominent white Bostonians, a practice that became common for books written by Black people. John Hancock and Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson were two of the signers. The introductory statement they signed reveals colonial (white) attitudes toward Africans and their intellectual abilities:

"We whose names are underwritten, do assure the world, that the poems specified in the following page were (as we verily believe) written by Phillis, a young Negro girl, who was but a few years since, brought an uncultivated barbarian, from Africa, and has ever since been, and now is, under the disadvantage of serving as a slave in a family in this town. She has been examined by some of the best judges and is thought qualified to write them."⁵⁶

The belief that Blacks were naturally inferior and incapable of producing worthwhile literature was also expressed by Thomas Jefferson in **Notes on the State of Virginia** (1781) as he arrogantly dismissed Wheatley's poetry:

"The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism."⁵⁷

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Supporters of Wheatley's poetry, both in America and abroad, responded to Jefferson's obvious racism by reminding him that her poetry was much better than the works of her contemporaries. In fact, Phillis Wheatley was the most popular colonial poet in England, a fact often overlooked.⁵⁸ In 1784 Phillis Wheatley died, penniless and working in a boarding house. She was 32 years old. She is known to have written forty-six poems. Eighteen of them were elegies.

Lucy Terry is only known to have written one poem, "Bars Flight," a description of the Deerfield, Massachusetts Massacre of August 28, 1746. Her poem was not published until 1893 in **A History of Deerfield, Massachusetts**. Terry's storytelling skills made her very popular but it seems that she was more of an orator than a writer. She successfully argued a land-dispute case in her own behalf before the Supreme Court and made an unsuccessful appeal to the administration of Williams College to admit one of her children.

Jupiter Hammon's poetry was very similar in theme to Wheatley's. His poem, "An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries" (1760) has the distinction of being the first poem published by an African in America. In 1778 he wrote "An Address to Phillis Wheatley, Ethiopian Poetess in Boston," a 21-stanza poem describing the joy and fulfillment that came from being a Christian. Hammon sincerely believed that slavery was a cross that one had to bear. However, in a 1786 "Address to the Negroes of the State of New York" Hammon's comments indicated that he opposed slavery.⁵⁹ Hammon's poetry, like Wheatley's, reflects what slavery had done to the psyche of some Africans. Religious indoctrination had convinced them that slavery had delivered them from a dark barbaric past. They were confined

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

mentally in a colonial environment that defined what was acceptable for slaves to write. Wheatley's youth and Hammon's lack of education further constricted them. Phillis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon were pioneers in the uses of literacy. They wrote and published at a time when few Americans, Black or white, were writing or publishing.

George Moses Horton, a slave in North Carolina, departed from the religious verse of his predecessors. His first volume of poems, **Hope of Liberty** (1829), made clear Horton's desire for freedom:

"Is it because my skin is black, that thou should be so
dull and stark,
And scorn to set me free? Then let me hasten
to the grave, the only refuge for the slave, who mourns
for liberty."⁶⁰

This stanza is similar in tone and sentiment to the words of the spiritual, **Freedom**:

"And before I'd be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave,
And go on to my Lord and be Free."

Horton's poems show a man committed to protesting the institution that denied him freedom. Through his poetry, others heard his call for freedom and many responded. In 1828, **Freedom's Journal**, the first Black newspaper, printed a front-page story about Horton. The Journal asked its readers to contribute funds to buy Horton's freedom, "Were each person of colour of this city to give but one penny, there would be no danger about obtaining his liberty."⁶¹ Free Black men such as David Walker and prominent white men like the governor of North Carolina tried unsuccessfully to

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

buy Horton out of bondage. His owner refused, saying that he needed him as a laborer. Horton did not get his freedom until he was 68 years old, after the Civil War. He published his last book of poetry, **Naked Genius**, as a free man. George Moses Horton deserves greater exposure in the curriculum. His poetry and life represent a greater awareness of his condition than that of his more popular predecessor, Phillis Wheatley. Horton was the first Black poet to write poetry protesting slavery.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911) was the most popular Black poet during this period. Her short story, "The Two Offers," (1859) was the first published by an African-American. Watkins lectured on behalf of the Anti-Slavery Society and used these gatherings as a forum to read her poetry. Her first volume of poetry, **Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects**, (1854) sold over fifty thousand copies and was into its twentieth printing by 1874. Watkins also addressed "womanist" issues in her poetry as can be seen in these lines from "A Double Standard" (1895):

"No golden weights can turn the scale
of justice in his sight; And what is
wrong in woman's life
In man's cannot be right."⁶²

Watkins' use of flowers as a metaphor for women is very effective. Her poem, "The Crocuses," juxtaposes the images of the "fairhaired dandelion" (white women) with the crocuses' "rich tints of beauty rare" (Black women). **The Mission of the Flowers** is a beautifully written tale of a rose whose ego leads her to transform all the flowers in the garden into roses. People are unhappy with the homogeneous garden and

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

she learns to respect the individuality of her sister flowers, and begins to see that they, as well as herself have their own missions.⁶³ Watkins was also dedicated to the cause of Black education, and taught for awhile. **Learning to Read** was written in 1872 and includes these observations:

"Our masters always tried to hide
Book learning from our eyes;
Knowledge didn't agree with slavery –
'Twould make us all too wise."⁶⁴

Watkins wrote one novel, **Iola Leroy**, and published several other books of poetry. She is an interesting writer whose works have vitality, rich imagery and social consciousness.

The Creole Poets of New Orleans were a small group of poets during the early 1800's who wrote in French.⁶⁵ They viewed France as a spiritual homeland and some of them eventually moved there. The most popular names in this group were Pierre Dalcour, Victor Sejour, Armand Lanusse, Nelson Debrosses and Nicol Riquet. They published the first anthology of poetry by Black poets in 1845, **Les Cenelles** (The Berries).

Black dialect poets before Paul Laurence Dunbar included James Edward Campbell, Daniel W. Davis, James D. Corrothers, Elliot B. Henderson, and J. Mord Allen. Their dialect verses were comparable to Dunbar's, some were better. They were certainly closer to writing Black dialect than white poets James Whitcomb Riley, Vachel Lindsay, and James Russell Lowell. The most comprehensive anthology of this genre is **Early Black American Poets**, edited by William H. Robinson.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Slave Narratives

Briton Hammon published the first narrative in this genre in 1760. John Marrant published in 1785. The respective titles of their works were **A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro Man** and **A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with J. Marrant, a Black**. Both narratives were published in London. This genre was the forerunner of the autobiography that we later see used by Douglass and contemporary AfricanAmericans.

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African (1789), is a vivid and detailed recollection of Vassa's life in Africa, his capture and enslavement. Vassa was born in Nigeria in 1745. He was kidnapped when he was 11 years old and ended up in Virginia. He later purchased his freedom and moved to London where he published his narrative which became a popular seller.

Autobiographies

The most popular autobiography of this period was written by Frederick Douglass, ex-slave, orator, abolitionist, writer, and publisher. Douglass' first written account of his life was the **Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass** (1845). Its short format made it similar to earlier slave narratives. Later, Douglass' refined literary skills elevated his work above that of his predecessors. In 1855 he expanded his earlier narrative into **My Bondage and My Freedom. The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass** was published in 1894. **Fourth of July Oration** is Douglass' eloquent statement of American hypocrisy:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future."⁶⁶

Martin Luther King echoed the same sentiments in a 1968 speech, **An American Dream:**

"America has been a schizophrenic personality. On the one hand she has proudly professed the noble principles of democracy, but on the other hand she has sadly practiced the very opposite of those principles. Indeed slavery and segregation have always been strange paradoxes in a nation founded on the principles that all men are created equal."⁶⁷

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

PERIODICALS

John B. Russwurm and **Samuel E. Cornish** founded **Freedom's Journal**, the first Black newspaper published in the United States. Russwurm was the first Black college graduate, receiving his degree from Bowdoin. The Journal's first issue was published in New York on March 16, 1827. The masthead read, "We wish to plead our own cause. Too long others have spoken for us." The Journal addressed the major issues of the day: slavery, equal rights, education, employment and citizenship. Cornish left the paper after six months and Russwurm ran it for a year, and then he went to Liberia where he became a teacher and then school superintendent. He later became governor of the colony of Maryland in Liberia. Cornish ran the paper changing its name in 1829 to **Rights of All**. Before returning to the Journal, Cornish worked briefly on the **Weekly Advocate**. Other Black news publications were the **Alienated American**, **Freeman's Advocate**, **Palladium of Liberty**, **Herald of Freedom**, **The Ram's Horn** and Frederick Douglass' **North Star**.⁶⁸

The first Black magazine **Mirror of Liberty** was published in 1847 by **David Ruggles** in New York. The **African Methodist Episcopal Church Magazine** (1841) and the **Christian Herald** (1848) were published by churches for their congregations. The Star of Zion (1867) is still the official paper of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Most of the periodicals, with the exception of the church publications, were not really news-oriented. They tended to present a point of view, primarily antislavery. With the rise in Black literacy that occurred after the Civil War, Black newspapers increased in number.

David Walker was a fiery opponent of slavery. In 1829 he published **Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; together with a Preamble, to the Colored Citizens of**

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

the World, but in particular and very expressly, to Those of the United States of America. Walker's Appeal was a lengthy treatise lauding African achievements and exhorting Black and white Americans to take whatever steps necessary to end the crime of slavery. Walker's appeal clearly shows that he, like other African-Americans of his time, were aware of their rich African heritage:

"When we take a retrospective view of the arts and science - the wise legislators - the Pyramids and other magnificent buildings - the turning of the Channel of the river Nile, by the sons of Africa or of Ham, among whom learning originated, and was carried thence into Greece, where it was improved and refined. Thence among the Romans, and all over the then enlightened parts of the world, and it has been enlightening to the dark and benighted minds of men from then,' down to this day."⁶⁹

Walker's other activities included writing for **Freedom's Journal** and campaigning to buy the freedom of George Moses Horton. Walker's Appeal caused an uproar, particularly in the South where bounties were offered for him dead or alive. Walker was found murdered on June 28, 1830, a year after his appeal made him a marked man. The tone and clarity of David Walker's Appeal is comparable to Malcolm X's speeches.

Ida B. Wells (1869-1931) was a dedicated journalist whose anti-lynching campaign inspired the formation of anti-lynching leagues. Wells was the editor of **Free Speech**, a Memphis newspaper that was destroyed after it printed allegations that white men had killed three Black men. Wells barely escaped town alive. She devoted her life to using the press to fight racial injustice. Other historic Black publications include **The Afro-American** (1892), **The Philadelphia Tribune** (1884),

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

The Rumor (1890). Turn of the century publications included the **Boston Guardian** (1901) founded by William Monroe Trotter, **The Chicago Defender** (1905), **The New York Age** (1903) and the NAACP's **Crisis Magazine** (1910) edited by W.E.B. DuBois.⁷⁰

William Wells Brown's first publication was **A Narrative of William Wells Brown** (1847). Brown's novel **Clotel, or the President's Daughter** (1853) was the first documented novel by an African-American but it was published in England. Clotel is based on the rumor that Thomas Jefferson had a slave family. Clotel was the eldest daughter. This novel was written in the "genteel" tradition, that is, it mildly protested slavery. His mulatto characters were ambivalent due to their mixed blood. Brown is also credited with being the first published Black playwright. The drama was called **The Escape, or a Leap for Freedom** (1858). In 1863 he published **The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius and His Achievements**, a collection of biographical essays highlighting Black achievements.

Harriet E. Wilson's novel **Our Nig** (1859) has the distinction of being the first novel published by a Black writer in America. **Harriet E. Wilson's** semi-autobiographical novel was registered in Massachusetts in August 1859 under the title, **Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In a Two Story White House, North Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There**. The discovery of this book by Yale Professor Henry Louis Gates and his persistent research to uncover the identity of its author would be an excellent study for high school students. Professor Gates' 59-page introduction explores the historical and literary significance of this novel and describes how he authenticated Wilson's racial identity by studying documents of that period.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Charles Waddell Chestnut was another author who wrote in the genteel tradition. In 1887 his writing career began with the publication of "The Goophered Grapevine," a short story published by **The Atlantic Monthly**. The publishers concealed his racial identity for fear that its audience would not accept the work of a Black man. Chestnut's first two novels, **The House Behind The Cedars** (1900) and **The Marrow of Tradition** (1901), dealt with themes of interracial romance and the agony that resulted from societal attitudes about these unions. The tragic characters in these novels seem to be in a state of limbo; they lack credibility as either Black or white people. Chestnut's most memorable and effective character is Uncle Julius, the sarcastic and candid storyteller in **The Conjure Woman** (1899). This collection of folktales closely resemble fables because of their moralistic tone.

Chestnut's fiction, which was among the best of its time, is filled with irony and often mocked the problem of the color line. Chestnut used dialect speech in many of his works. His other works were **The Wife of his Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line** (1899) and **The Colonel's Dream** (1905). Chestnut's short fiction is excellent for classroom use.

Paul Laurence Dunbar is best known for his dialect poetry. His first collection, **Oak and Ivy**, was published in 1893. Dunbar's poetry was accommodationist at its best. Using the stereotype of the "happy darkey" who lived an idyllic life on the plantation, Dunbar recreated the image that had been popularized in Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus tales and in the works of Thomas Nelson Page and A.C. Gordon. Dunbar's rise to fame came about with the publication of **Lyrics of a Lowly Life** (1896) that contained this introduction by William Dean Howells, reviewer for Harper's Weekly:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"So far as I can remember, Paul Dunbar was the only man of pure African blood and of American civilization to feel the Negro life aesthetically and express it lyrically."⁷¹

Although Dunbar is remembered because of his dialect writing, his most effective poems are written in standard English. **We Wear the Mask, Sympathy, The Debt,** and **Night** are examples of his non-dialect poetry. Of his short fiction, **The Tragedy of Three Forks**, a story about a lynching with an ironic twist, is a welcome departure from his accommodationist themes. Dunbar's other poetry collections were: **Majors and Minors** (1896), **Lyrics of the Hearthside** (1899), **Lyrics of Love and Laughter** (1903) and **Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow** (1905). Posthumous publications include **The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar** (1913) and **Little Brown Baby** (1940), a collection of poems for children. Dunbar wrote four novels: **The Uncalled** (1898), **The Love of Landry** (1900), **The Fanatics** (1901) and **The Sport of the Gods** (1902). The latter has been described as his best work in this genre. His short story collections include: **Folks from Dixie** (1898), **The Strength of Gideon** (1900), **In Old Plantation Days** (1903) and **Heart of Happy Hollow** (1904). Several books further describe Dunbar's impact on African-American literature. They are: **Black Poets of the U.S.**, Jean Wagner; **Paul Laurence Dunbar: Poet of His People**, Benjamin Brawley and **That Dunbar Boy: The Story of America's Famous Negro Poet**; Jean Gould. Dunbar died in 1906. He was 34 years old.

Dunbar and Chestnut's attempts to write in Black dialect made them forerunners of the Harlem Renaissance. Older students can compare the dialect writings of Dunbar and Chestnut to that of Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown to discover why the latter two were more successful at translating Black folk culture into written form. Neither Dunbar nor Chestnut were able to adequately capture Black folk language in writing, but the stage had been set and the new Black writers acted on it.

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

W.E.B. DuBois prophesied in **The Souls of Black Folk** (1903) that:

"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."⁷²

America lived up to his prophecy. At the turn of the century people of African descent were faced with increased racist violence, governmental indifference and economic hardships as they moved into America's urban centers. Lynchings were common and Black people were brutally attacked and murdered in riots instigated by whites in cities such as East St. Louis (1917), Atlanta (1906), Washington, D.C. (1919) and New Orleans (1900). World War I and U.S. intervention and aggression in the Caribbean contributed to political, social and economic hardships for all Americans. Whites lashed out at Blacks, blaming them for the general malaise in the U.S. Against this backdrop, a major Black literary movement began.

"Harlem was the queen of the black belts drawing Afro-Americans together in a vast humming hive. They had swarmed in from different states, from the islands of the Caribbean and from Africa."⁷³

So wrote Claude McKay in **Harlem Metropolis**. Langston Hughes arrived by way of Joplin, Missouri, Claude McKay and Marcus Garvey from Jamaica. Nella Larsen, Jessie Redmond Fauset, Wallace Thurman, and Rudolph Fisher were others who found their way to Harlem, the "melting pot" of African-American arts and letters. Harlem, U.S.A., where the "New Negro" according to Alain Locke, gathered and nurtured the era known as the Harlem Renaissance. Harlem was to Black America

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

what Egypt and Timbuctu had been Africa: a magnetic force attracting finest and most creative minds of the Black race.

The Harlem Renaissance began to emerge as a major literary force in the 1920's. The Renaissance represented a "confluence" of African-American oral and written traditions, according to Black literary scholar Clyde Taylor. Earlier, Dunbar and Chestnutt had attempted to merge the two. The young writers of the Harlem Renaissance, most notably Langston Hughes, succeeded in translating Black speech into written form without losing its rhythm, meaning and spontaneity. The Harlem Renaissance with its romantic themes of Africa and Black folk culture signaled the beginning of a new Black literary tradition. Black writers wrote about the human condition and the peculiar impact that racism and oppression had on the everyday experiences of Black people. Themes of racial pride and Black nationalism were fostered by Marcus Mosiah Garvey's Pan-African movement. The writers of the Harlem Renaissance used the voices of everyday Black folk to speak against injustice and to celebrate the beauty and uniqueness of being black.

Langston Hughes was the most popular writer to come out of the Harlem Renaissance. He contributed to the Black literary landscape until his death in 1967. Born in Joplin, Missouri in 1902, Hughes wrote in every genre. He masterfully portrayed the spirit of Black folk. He utilized the rhythm of Black music and language and skillfully drummed out melodies of pride, frustration, humor, anger, pain, and hope. He used images of dreams and rivers to express the continuity of African life.

Hughes' first publication was **The Weary Blues** (1926), followed by **Fine Clothes to the Jew** (1927). His first novel, **Not Without Laughter** (1930), is semi-biographical.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

The novel's main character must overcome poverty and a divided family to survive in a rural Kansas town. **Tambourines to Glory** (1938) was his second novel.

Jesse B. Simple is the most entertaining character in Black literature. Simple is a Harlemitte whose humorous commentaries on race relations, war, love, and other popular issues are incisive. The Simple stories are collected in five volumes: **Simple Speaks His Mind** (1950), **Simple Stakes a Claim** (1957), **Simple Takes a Wife** (1953), **The Best of Simple** (1961), and **Simple's Uncle Sam** (1965). The latter two are still in print. Hughes wrote two short story collections: **Something in Common** (1963) and **The Ways of White Folks** (1934). His major plays are included in **Five Plays by Langston Hughes** (1963): **Simply Heavenly**, based on the Simple stories; **Mulatto**, the longest running Black play on Broadway in 1935; **Little Ham**, a humorous look at Harlem and the numbers racket; **Soul Gone Home**, and **Tambourines to Glory**. Hughes wrote two autobiographies, **The Big Sea** (1941) and **I Wonder as I Wander** (1956). **The Dream Keeper** (1932) is a wonderful collection of his early poetry. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960's provided the theme for Hughes' last poetry collection, **The Panther and the Lash** (1967).

Claude McKay was born in Jamaica in 1890. In 1921 he arrived in the U.S. and published his first two poetry books. **Constab Ballads and Songs of Jamaica**. McKay wrote several novels, **Home to Harlem** (1928), **Banjo** (1929), **Gingertown** (1932). **Banana Bottom** (1933), his last novel, is probably his best. It examines the impact missionaries had on Jamaican folk culture. McKay was most effective as a poet. "If We Must lie," his most celebrated poem, was read by Winston Churchill before the British House of Commons during World War II.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Countee Cullen was born and raised in New York. Unlike Hughes, Cullen wrote in standard verse. His poem **Heritage** explores the theme of alienation of Africans in the Diaspora. **Yet Do I Marvel** is a tribute to Black poets:

"Yet do I marvel at this curious
Thing: To make a poet Black, and
bid him sing.

Cullen aspired to be a "conventional" poet. He was a follower of John Keats, to whom he later dedicated a poem, **To John Keats, Poet, At Springtime**. Cullen's poetry collections include: **Copper Sun** (1927), **The Ballad of the Brown Girl** (1927), and **The Black Christ** (1929). **Caroling Dusk** (1927) is an anthology of African-American poetry. In the 1940's he published **The Lost Zoo** and **My Lives and How I Lost Them** (by Christopher Cat). His only novel, **One Way to Heaven**, was published in 1932.

James Weldon Johnson, poet, songwriter and author, wrote **Lift Every Voice and Sing** (1901) with his brother, John Rosamond Johnson. This song achieved the distinction of being called the "Negro National Anthem." Although Johnson is not considered a Renaissance writer, his works are in sentiment and tone similar to the writers of the period. Johnson published the classic **Book of American Negro Poetry** in 1922. In the **Book of American Negro Spirituals** (1925), Johnson examines the roots of Black spirituals and compares their structural similarity to African songs. In **God's Trombones** (1927) Johnson uses the rhythm and tone of the "Black folk preacher," and the spirituals as source material for the poetry in this volume.⁷⁵ Johnson's other publications were **Black Manhattan** (1930) an account of Black culture in New York, **The Autobiography of An Ex-Coloured Man** (1912), **Fifty Years and Other Poems** (1917), and **St. Peter Relates An Incident** (1935). His autobiography, **Along This Way**, was written in 1933.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Waring Cuney and **Sterling Brown** wrote during the Harlem Renaissance although neither published any books. **Arna Bontemps** lived in California and won Opportunity Magazine's Alexander Pushkin Award for Poetry in 1926. He later joined the Renaissance notables. His friendship and professional association with Langston Hughes is documented in **Langston Hughes - Arna Bontemps Letters, 1925-1967** (1980).

Other writers of Harlem Renaissance fame were: Rudolph Fisher, **The Walls Of Jericho** (1928) and **The Conjure Man Dies** (1932); Jessie R. Fauset, **There is Confusion** (1924), **Plum Bun** (1929), **The Chinaberry Tree** (1931) and **Comedy American Style** (1933); Georgia Douglas Johnson, **The Heart of a Woman** (1918), **Bronze** (1922), and **Autumn Love Cycles** (1928); Wallace Thurman, **Blacker the Berry** (1929); and Nella Larsen, **Quicksand** (1928), and **Passing** (1929).

Just as Garvey's Back to Africa Movement had attracted Black people throughout America, so had the literary and cultural aspects of the Harlem Renaissance, as described by historian John Hope Franklin:

"There were poetry circles in Houston and Detroit, little theaters in Chicago and Illinois, and interested students of painting and art in Cleveland and Nashville."⁷⁶

Sterling Brown has probably had the biggest influence on the use of the Black folk idiom in literature. The rhythm of Black language is characteristic of Brown's work. The distinctive voice of the blues is heard in this excerpt from the *Odyssey of Big Boy*:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"Train done caught me on de trestle
Man done caught me wid his wife,
His doggone purty wife."⁷⁷

Brown's poetry is derived from the same group of folk that John Gwaltney interviews in **Drylongso** (1980). Brown was the Black adviser to the Federal Writers Project from 1936-1939. His publications include **Southern Road** (1932), **Negro Poetry and Drama** (1937), and **The Negro In American Fiction** (1937). He edited **The Negro Caravan** (1941) with Arthur Davis and Ulysses Lee. Today it remains as one of the most comprehensive anthologies of Black literature ever written. Brown also wrote various essays and critical reviews of Black literature. Brown's use of Black folk expression has been a model for other Black writers. Regrettably, Sterling Brown has never realized the accolades of other Renaissance writers.

Jean Toomer published one book, **Cane** (1923), a collection of vignettes interspersed with poetry. Toomer wrote *Cane* after a visit to rural Georgia where for the first time he heard Black folk voices and in them saw a "rich dusk beauty." Toomer's personal quest for an identity that he never found is the subject of a recent critical biography published by Howard University Press.

Literary events in Haiti provide the first opportunity to examine the influence the Renaissance writers had on other writers in the African Diaspora. **Jacques Roumain** of Haiti urged his fellow writers to listen to the Harlem writers, much could be learned from them. Roumain began to incorporate Haitian folk culture in his work. He was greatly influenced by Langston Hughes and mimicked Hughes' use of Black speech in a poem called **Langston Hughes** (1931):

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"At Lagos you knew sad-faced girls.
Silver circled their ankles.
They offered themselves to you naked as the night.
Gold circled by the moon."⁷⁸

Hughes later assisted in translating Roumain's novel, **Master of the Dew**, in 1947.

The Harlem Renaissance also influenced the American literary scene. White writers, fascinated with the vitality and freshness of the "new" Black literature, used Black themes in their works. Eugene O'Neill wrote **The Emperor Jones** (1920); Waldo Frank, **Holiday** (1923); Sherwood Anderson, **Dark Laughter** (1925); and the infamous **Nigger Heaven** (1926) by Carl Van Vechten. **Negro** (1934), an anthology by Nancy Cunard, is a useful volume. It includes works by Africans in America and the Diaspora. **Negro** was reprinted in 1970.

Within a few months after the stock market crash of 1929, the literary outpourings of the Harlem Renaissance tapered off. Langston Hughes describes the climate for Black authors in 1930:

"We were no longer in vogue, anyway we Negroes. Sophisticated New Yorkers turned to Noel Coward. Colored actors began to go hungry, publishers politely rejected new manuscripts, and patrons found other uses for their money ... The generous 1920's were over."⁷⁹

1930-1940

In spite of the bare literary prospects for Black writers, **Zora Neale Hurston** published all of her works during the 1930's. She was an anthropology student under

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Franz Boas, Barnard College Professor of Anthropology. Hurston's **Mules and Men** was the first major collection of Black folklore compiled by an African-American. **Their Eyes Were Watching God** (1937) is the saga of Janie Starks, a woman who struggles to find her own place in a racist and sexist world.

Hurston's writing did not support her and she died penniless in 1960. Alice Walker is responsible for the renewed interest in Zora Neale Hurston by publishing excerpts from her work in **I Love Myself When I Am Laughing** (1979). Hurston's first novel was **Jonah's Gourd Vine** in 1934 followed by **The Sanctified Church** (1935), **Moses Man of the Mountain** (1939), **Tell My Horse** (1938), **Dust Tracks on a Road** (1942), and **Seraph on the Suwanee** (1948).

Arna Bontemps published his first novel **God Sends Sunday** in 1932. **Black Thunder** (1936) was a historical novel about Gabriel Prosser's slave revolt. **Drums of Dusk** (1939) examined the Haitian revolution. He also wrote **100 Years of Negro Freedom** (1961) and **Young Booker** (1972) for young people. **Any Place But Here** was published in 1966. He edited the **Book of Negro Folklore** (1958) and **The Poetry of the Negro** (1949) with Langston Hughes, his longtime friend and associate.

Richard Wright's works are characterized by his use of stark realism to describe the Black experience. His first published work, **Uncle Tom's Children** was published in 1938. **Native Son**, published in 1940, shocked the nation. Its central character, Bigger Thomas, is a tragic figure, whose life is warped by the social, economic, and racial realities of America. **Native Son** was the most talked about and reviewed novel ever published by a Black man. **Black Boy** (1945) was Wright's

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

autobiography. His other works were: **The Outsider** (1953), **The Long Dream** (1958), **Black Power** (1954), **White Man, Listen!** (1957), **Eight Men** (1961) and a posthumous publication, **Lawd Today** (1963). **Twelve Million Black Voices** (1941) is a photographic folk history in Wright's words "of a debased feudal folk." Wright's works had a certain pathos to them. He saw beauty in the lives of everyday Black folk and wrote in an angry, uncompromising voice that later resurfaced in the literature of the writers of the 1960's.

1940-1960

The 1940's saw the emergence of several important Black writers. **Margaret Walker** published **For My People** in 1942, a blend of poetry and folk ballads. Her major poems **For My People** and **We Have Been Believers** have a timeless quality. **Jubilee**, her only novel, was published in 1966. A new collection of poetry, **Prophets for a New Day** appeared in 1970 followed by **How I Wrote Jubilee** in 1972.

Gwendolyn Brooks continues to be a significant voice in Black literature. Her influence on the writers of the 1960's is seen in a book of poems written in her honor, **For Gwendolyn**. Brooks' major achievement came in 1950 when she became the first Black poet to receive the Pulitzer Prize for poetry with **Annie Allen** (1949). Other poetry books by Ms. Brooks are: **A Street in Bronzeville** (1945), **The Bean Eaters** (1960), **In the Mecca** (1968), **Riot** (1969) and a children's collection, **Bronzeville Boys and Girls** (1956). **Maud Martha** (1953) is her only novel. The influence of the 1960's are reflected in her later work as she graphically describes Black life in the ghetto, something she had done earlier but in milder tones.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Other writers of this period were: Ann Petry, **The Street** (1946), **Country Place** (1947), **The Narrows** (1953), and several children's titles: **The Drugstore Cat** (1949), **Harriet Tubman** (1955), and **Tituba of Salem Village** (1963). Frank Yerby, who earned his fame writing white historical romance novels, is the most published Black novelist to date. Chester Himes, Robert Hayden, Julian Mayfield, and Owen Dodson were also published during this period.

Ralph Ellison's **Invisible Man** was voted the most popular American novel from 1945-1965 in a Book Week Magazine poll conducted in 1965. **Invisible Man** is a man's search for identity:

"He knows what he is not; He is not any of the roles society expects him to play. But he does not yet know what he is."⁸⁰

Ellison's novel is an intriguing novel for high school students. **Shadow and Act** (1964) is a collection of essays that was Ellison's only other publication. It is useful because it provides insight into the influences on the author's life.

James Baldwin's literary career began with the publication of **Go Tell It On The Mountain** (1953). It is a graphic portrayal of life in Harlem. The book is semi-autobiographical, many of its scenes are based on Baldwin's experiences with his stepfather who, like the main character, was a storefront preacher. Baldwin is a brilliant essayist, as shown in **Notes of A Native Son** (1955), **Nobody Knows My Name** (1961), **The Fire Next Time** (1963), and **No Name In the Street** (1972). Baldwin's searing commentaries on racism and Black identity are revealing. He critically reviews **Native Son** and **Uncle Tom's Cabin** in **Notes of a Native Son**. Baldwin's other works are: **Giovanni's Room** (1956), **Another Country** (1962), **Tell Me How Long The Train's Been Gone** (1968), **If Beale Street Could Talk** (1974), and

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Just Above My Head (1978). He has written two plays, **Blues for Mr. Charlie** (1964) and **The Amen Corner** (1968). **Going to Meet the Man** (1965) is a collection of short stories.

Lorraine Hansberry wrote **A Raisin in the Sun** (1959), Broadway's longest-running Black play and first Broadway play written by a Black woman. The play won the 1958-1959 New York Drama Critics Circle Award. Ms. Hansberry also published several other plays; **The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window** (1965) and **Les Blancs** and **The Last Plays of Lorraine Hansberry** (1972). She died in 1965 at 35 years of age.

1960-1984

The 1960's marked the re-emergence of Black Nationalism. New voices such as Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. were heard throughout Black America. Black identity and racial pride reached a pinnacle during the late sixties and early seventies. Black communities across the country responded to social, economic and political oppression as Hughes had described in his poem **Montage of a Dream Deferred** (1951):

"What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore - and then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags like a heavy load
Or does it explode?"⁸¹

The aftermath of the riots of the 1960's was a Black creative explosion. As Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo wrote:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"While we still sing about our oppression, we must sing beautifully. A death dance must be danced beautifully."⁸²

Poetry was the genre most used to express the revival of Black Nationalism. Sonia Sanchez, Amin Baraka (Leroi Jones), Haki Madhubuti (Don L. Lee), Mari Evans, Dudley Randall, Jayne Cortez, Henry Dumas, Larry Neal, Ted Joans, and Quincy Troupe represented the new breed of Black voices. These poets created their own literary style using Black language as seen in this example from Sonia Sanchez:

"Hurt.
u worried abt a
ittle hurting.
man
hurt ain't the bag u
shd be in."⁸³

The "new" Black poets captured the beat of the contemporary Black spirit.

The Black literary surge of the 1960's introduced new voices and rediscovered old voices with messages as valid today as they were decades ago. W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, David Walker, Frederick Douglass and Alain Locke spoke to the new culture bearers. The poetic voice was stronger during this period than at any other time. Hundreds of Black poetry volumes were published during this time, many of them by small Black publishers. There is a wealth of material in this genre, but teachers need to review the poetry in order to select those most appropriate for classroom use.

From soapboxes on 125th Street in Harlem to the dusty roads of rural Mississippi the Black oratorical voice was once again heard and became the most effective genre for reaching the masses of Black people.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s **I Have A Dream** won the 1970 Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word. Malcolm X had a gift of being able to describe Black oppression in America in terms everyone could understand:

"I'm not going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner. Sitting at the table doesn't make you a diner ... Being here in America doesn't make you an American."⁸⁴

Stokely Carmichael's voice was heard throughout the world as he talked of Black Power.

Novelists of this period wrote of Black pride and the realities of Black life. Africa reappeared as a literary theme. Some of the novels of this period that can be used with high school students are **Manchild In the Promised Land** (1965), Claude Brown; **Cornbread, Earl and Me** (1966), Ronald Fair; **The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou** (1968), Kristin Hunter; **Cotillion** (1971), John Oliver Killens; and **Brown Girl, Brownstones** (1959), Paule Marshall. **Black Literature for High School Students** is a good resource identifying suitable choices for the classroom.

Black drama underwent a revival during this period. Playwrights such as Ed Bullins, Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Darwin T. Turner, Adrienne Kennedy and Jimmy Garrett used popular themes in their dramas. Teachers need to review plays in advance to select those suitable for classroom use.

Numerous Black publishers came into existence during this time. Of those who remain Third World Press (Chicago) and Broadside Press (Detroit) have published works by the major innovators of this time.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Two literary genres emerged during this second Black "renaissance." "Womanist" literature, a term used by novelist Alice Walker to distinguish this trend from the white-dominated feminist movement, and Black children's literature which will be examined later, "Womanist" literature refers to literature that focuses on womanhood. Black women writers who have shaped this genre include: **Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and Toni Cade Bambara**. In 1983 Alice Walker's **The Color Purple** was the first novel by a Black woman to win a Pulitzer Prize. Anthologies in this genre include: **The Black Woman** (1970), Toni Cade Bambara; **Black-Eyed Susans** (1975) and **Midnight Birds** (1980), Mary Helen Washington; **Black Women in White America** (1973), Gerda Lerner; **Sturdy Black Bridges** (1979) edited by Roseann P. Bell, Bettye J. Parker and Beverly Guy Shetfall, **But Some of Us Are Brave** (1982) edited by Gloria T. Hall, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith. Two recent anthologies of Black women poets are **Black Sister** (1981), Erlene Stetson and **Confirmation** (1982) by Amiri (Leroi Jones) and Amina Baraka. **Black Women Writers (1950-1980) A Critical Evaluation** (1984) edited by Mari Evans and **Black Women Writers at Work** (1984) edited by Claudia Tate are invaluable resources for teachers and students interested in further exploring this genre.

AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE PRIOR TO 1950

Prior to the 1920's Black children's literature was practically nonexistent. An 1896 edition of **Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes** included a rhyme titled "Ten Little Niggers." The same poem was also printed in an October, 1919 issue of St. Nicholas; Scribner's Illustrated Magazine for Girls and Boys, a pioneer publication in children's literature. In both publications the poem was accompanied by ridiculous

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

looking pictures of ten Black male children. This was the image of Black people that was being used to shape the attitudes and perceptions of young white children towards Black people. Studies examining the development of racial attitudes among young children indicate that children's ideas about race are formed by the time they enter school. The image of Blacks in early American literature encouraged negative attitudes towards Blacks by portraying racial stereotypes. **The Story of Little Black Sambo** (1899) by Helen Bannerman provided the American public with a character who was used to ridicule Blacks in literature and advertising. Even though Sambo was from India, by exaggerating his dark skin coloring and physical features such as jet black skin, big rolling eyes and big red lips, Sambo became a symbolic Black.

Children's books with Black characters that were published by the major publishers were written by white authors. Their stories mirrored popular attitudes and stereotypes of Black people. The most common portrayals of Blacks during the time showed families where the father was either a very weak character or absent; where deprivation and poverty was normal; and the plantation a common setting. The plantation mentality and images of the "happy darkey" were being kept alive in the literature at a time when Black people were moving into the urban centers of America. Popular titles during this time were: **Across the Cotton Patch** (1935), **Colonial Twins of Virginia** (1924), and **Diddie, Dumps, and Tot, or Plantation Child Life** (1930). These titles showed Black children as amusing pickaninnies with pet-like characteristics who spoke using strange unintelligible words. The **Nicodemus** (1932-1945) books by Inez Hogan incorporated these images into a farcical series of books about Blacks.

African-American authors did attempt to present Black children and the general public with other images. Black history was the focus of most of their publications.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

The intention was to show Black youth and America that Black people had a rich and productive history. It was hoped that by making this information available Black people would command the respect of their countrymen. Some of the available titles were: **For Freedom** (1927), Arthur H. Fauset; **Negro Makers of History** (1928), Carter G. Woodson; **Child's Story of the Negro** (1938), Jane D. Shackelford; and **ABC's of Negro History** (1933), Charles C. Dawson.

From 1911 to 1919, **Crisis Magazine**, the official publication of the NAACP, annually published a children's issue, of which W.E.B. DuBois was the editor. In January, 1920, DuBois, Augustus Granville Dill, and Jessie Redmon Fauset began publishing **The Brownies' Book**, a magazine for children ages six to sixteen. Dr. DuBois described the purpose of this pioneering effort in Black children's literature:

"To make colored children realize that being colored is a normal, beautiful thing, to make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race, to make them know that other colored children have grown into beautiful, useful famous persons, to teach them delicately, a code of honor and action in their relations with white children, to turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their own homes and companions, to point out the best amusements and joys and worthwhile things of life, to inspire them to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice." ⁸⁵

The magazine contained folklore from throughout the African Diaspora, historical biographies, music, games, literature, puzzles, "The Grownups Corner" for parents, and featured photos of children in its "Little People of the Month" section. Its readers were referred to as "Brownies."

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

DuBois analyzed current events as "The Crow" in a feature entitled "As the Crow Flies:"

"The crow is black and O so beautiful, shining with dark blues and purples, with little hints of gold in his mighty wings. He flies far above the Earth, looking downward with his sharp eyes. What a lot of things he must see and hear and if he could only talk - and lo, The Brownies' Book has made him talk to you."⁸⁶

"The Crow" also conveyed the message that Black is beautiful:

"I like my black feathers - don't you?
Whirl, whirl, up, whirl and fly home
to my sweet, little black crowlets . . .
Ah, but they're black and sweet and bonnie."⁸⁷

Some of the magazine's contributors were Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Effie Lee Newsome, Arthur Huff Fauset and Georgia Douglas Johnson. The last issue of The Brownies' Book appeared in December, 1921. DuBois, Dill, and Fauset had published it for two years at their own expense but the financial problems caused by the industrial depression following World War I made it impossible to continue this "monthly magazine for the children of the sun." Many of the ideas and features of The Brownies' Book were incorporated in the now defunct publication, **Ebony Jr.**, an excellent magazine for classroom use.

Written recreational literature was still not readily available during this time. Picture books such as **My Happy Days** by Jane Shackelford were aimed at showing that Black families lived normal lives like other American families. Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps co-authored **Popo and Fifina** (1932), a book about two Haitian children. Although there was a lack of written literature for Black children, the rich Black oral tradition helped to fill the void.

BLACK CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE

Rhyming, handclapping and ring games are a genre of folklore that has existed among Black children for generations.

Black children have maintained the vitality of this unique folklore using their improvisational abilities. The children have retained the same rhythmic quality in language and gesture in environments as diverse as the streets of Harlem to the red clay of Mississippi. **Apples on a Stick, The Folklore of Black Children** (1983) is a collection of over 50 counting rhymes, circle and hand-clapping games, jump-rope rhymes, names and nonsense verses and taunts. The authors refer to their collection as "playground poetry." An example of how Black children improvise and create their own poetry is seen in the following examples. Example 1 is from **Apples on a Stick** and was collected from school children in Houston, Texas. Example 2 is from students at the Black Educational Center in Portland, Oregon and was told to this author by five-year-old Jamila Harris.

MISS SUE

Example 1 (Houston)	Example 2 (Portland)
Miss Sue, Miss Sue Miss Sue from Alabama Here she comes with a hickory stick Uh-huh Uh-huh	Miss Sue, Miss Sue Miss Sue from Alabama She got the A, B, C, D, E, F, G She got the H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P

Example 1 (Houston)	Example 2 (Portland)
<p>Here she come with a hickory stick Uh-huh Uh-huh Hey Dishelle Somebody's calling your name Hey Dishelle Somebody's playing your game Hey Dishelle Somebody wants you on the telephone If it ain't my man Tell him I ain't home Sitting at the table Chopping up potatoes Waiting for the clock to go Chock a boo Chock a boo She say wishy washy She say wishy washy boom.⁸⁸</p>	<p>She got the smooth skin She got the smooth skin Sitting at the table peeling potatoes Watching the clock go Tick a bobba Tick Tick a bobba Tick a bobba Stop Tick a bobba Tick Tick a bobba Tick a bobba Stop Now let me hear you motion Bubble Eyes, Bubble Eyes Dirty Hands, Dirty Hands Stinky Feet, Stinky Feet Gotcha</p>

The imagery of the ticking clock is in both verses. Each version has twenty-one lines. In the Portland presentation it is a hand-clapping game with the participants standing in a ring.

There was also a wealth of stories available in the oral literature. Julius Lester's **Black Folktales** (1970), and Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps' **Book of Negro**

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Folklore are excellent collections of Black oral folklore. The African pastime of storytelling sustained Black children's creative abilities, and imagination. Most importantly, it must be remembered that the African oral tradition functioned for African-Americans in the same way it did for Africans. It transmitted the customs, values and traditions of the group.

During the 1940's historical "Negro" biographies for children became popular. J.A. Rogers wrote **Your History** (1940), an illustrated collection of over 200 biographical facts of Black personalities throughout the world! Other titles were **We Have Tomorrow** (1945), Arna Bontemps; **The Story of Phillis Wheatley** (1949), Shirley Graham; **Negro Makers of History** (1945), Carter G. Woodson; and **There Was Once a Slave** (1947), Shirley Graham. Arna Bontemps compiled the first anthology of African-American poetry for young readers. Its title, **Golden Slippers** (1941), was taken from a song by James A. Bland who also wrote **Carry Me Back to Old Virginny**, Virginia's state song:

Oh, dem Gold Slippers;
Oh, dem golden slippers!
Oh, dem golden slippers!
Golden slippers I'm gwinter wear,
To walk de golden streets.⁸⁹

There was a sprinkling of Black children's literature during the 1950's, Langston Hughes published **Famous American Negroes** and **Famous Negro Music Makers** in 1954. White publishers were still not open to books with Black themes. The Black cultural renaissance of the 1960's was about to change that. Black children's literature was about to become a popular genre. Black communities across America demanded that schools purchase materials that reinforced pride in Black children.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Black authors responded to the Black community's call for positive portrayals of Black children in books. The major white publishers, with their sights on profits, also responded.

CONTEMPORARY BLACK CHILDREN'S LITERATURE (1960-1984)

Black folk culture was incorporated into Black children's literature and writers such as Eloise Greenfield, Lucille Clifton, Mari Evans, John Steptoe, did for children's literature what Hughes, McKay, Cullen, and Fauset had done for Black literature during the Harlem Renaissance. The two most prolific writers of Black children's books are Lucille Clifton and Eloise Greenfield.

Ms. Greenfield draws on historical and cultural traditions for most of her work. In **Africa Dream** (1977) a little girl journeys to Africa, the land of her long-ago ancestors. This book establishes the family bonds between Africans and African-Americans in phrases like:

"Till my long-ago granddaddy
With my daddy's face
Stretched out his arms
and welcomed me home."⁹⁰

Black history is explored in biographies of **Paul Robeson**, **Mary McLeod Bethune**, **Rosa Parks** and in the poem **Harriet Tubman**.

Greenfield uses her fictional characters to show that love has a special, lasting quality with many ways of expression. **Honey I Love** (1978), a collection of poems told from a child's perspective, is her strongest statement about love of self, family, friends and group history. Any child would feel good by reading these lines:

"I love,
I love a lot of things
A whole lot of things
And honey
I love ME, too."⁹¹

Honey I Love is filled with messages of pride and Black family unity. This book will inspire all children to explore their feelings about themselves and their families. A record album is also available from Honey Productions in Washington, D.C., featuring children performing poems from the book with musical accompaniment. Ms. Greenfield also performs with the children and discusses the roots of jazz.

Grandmama's Joy shows children that although adults may have problems it does not diminish the love they feel for them. **Good Times** (formerly Bubbles) is a celebration of the joy young children feel when they first learn to read. **ICanDoItBy Myself** focuses on the pride that comes from doing something independently for the first time.

Alesia (1981) is the autobiography of the near-fatal car accident of nine-year-old Alesia Revis and her painfully long eight-year recovery period. Alesia tells her story with the guidance, support and skill of Ms. Greenfield.

Lucille Clifton has written over twenty children's books. Clifton's most popular character is Everett Anderson. He is also the most permanent character to come out of this genre. Through Everett's eyes children can explore their feelings about loneliness, birth of a sibling, divorce, death, step-parents and growing up. Clifton has created a character who shows children the ever-changing nature of the human condition using situations that may be familiar to them.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Africa is a recurrent theme in many of the books written for young children. African language is used to explore East African culture in **Moja Means One** and **Jambo Means Hello** by Muriel Feelings. Ancestral images are used in several books to teach African history and culture. The "grandmother" character is often used to deliver powerful messages in the tradition of ancient African storytellers. Great-Grandmaw in **Cornrows** by Camille Yarbrough begins the story of cornrowed hair:

"There is a spirit that lives inside of you. It keeps on growin. It never dies. Sometimes when you're afraid, it trembles. An sometimes, when you're hurt an ready to give up, it barely flikers. But it keeps growin. It never dies. Now a long, long time ago, in a land called Africa, our ancient people worked through that spirit."⁹²

Great-Grandmaw talks about slavery:

"The clan, the village, the priest, the bride, the royalty, all were packed into the slaver ships and brought across the sea . . ."⁹³

In **All Us Come Cross the Water** by Lucille Clifton, Big Mama, the great-greatgrandmother, speaks of the family's roots:

"My Mama say her and her Mama was brought from Whydah in Dahomey in 1855."⁹⁴

Ms. Clifton makes a rare departure from the tendency to use female ancestral figures and introduces Tweezer, "a grown man friend over to the Panther Book Shop." He teaches Ujamaa, the central character, that all Black people have roots in Africa:

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

"All us crossed the water. We one people, Ujamaa. Boy got that name oughta know that. All us crossed the water."⁹⁵

Mari Evans uses the name of a Nigerian god in her book **Jim Flying High**. Jim is a mudfish who finds himself stranded out of the water:

"Olukun is Ruler-of-the-Water.
Everybody in Alkebu-Lan knows who Olukun is."⁹⁶

In Nigerian religion, Olukun is the god of water. According to world renowned historian, Dr. Yosef-ben Jochannan, Alkebu-Lan was the original name of the African continent. **Africa Dream** by Eloise Greenfield and **Birthday** by John Steptoe also have African themes.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE 6th - 12th GRADE

Most of the books mentioned on pages 42-67 are generally appropriate to use with this age group.

Several writers deserve special attention because their work is geared to the pre-adolescent and teenager.

Mildred D. Taylor has written three books on the Logans, a Black Mississippi family who survive the hardships of the depression, racism and economic exploitation. Their strength and durability comes from having a strong family structure, which includes a grandmother whose wisdom guides them all. Black pride and self-determination are woven into each of Ms. Taylor's characters. The stories are told by Cassie who first appears in **Song of the Trees** (1975). The book is based on a true

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

story from the author's family and describes how the family bands together to save their property from being taken over by a greedy landowner. Taylor's next story about the Logan family, **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry** won the 1977 Newbery Medal. **Let the Circle Be Unbroken** (1981) is the sequel. The courage, perseverance and pride of the Logans makes them an exceptional family in children's literature.

This excerpt from Mildred Taylor's 1977 Newbery Award acceptance speech for **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry** describes the influences she hopes the Logan family will have on children:

"I will continue the Logans' story with the same life guides that have always been mine, for it is my hope that these books, one of the first chronicles to mirror a Black child's hopes and fears from childhood innocence to awareness to bitterness and disillusionment, will one day be instrumental in teaching children of all colors the tremendous influence that Cassie's generation - my father's generation - had in bringing about the great Civil Rights Movement of the fifties and sixties."⁹⁷

Judith Berry Griffin, a lesser known author has written two historical books. They are mentioned because Ms. Griffin presents a view of American history that we seldom find in children's literature. Both books should be used in the classroom. **Nat Turner**, her first book, portrays Nat as an intelligent and proud Blackman who was willing to risk death in his struggle for freedom. Griffin provides children with insight on how Turner's revolt affected other Black people:

"He helped other slaves to see that they also were men - proud as any men - and proud men could not go on and on and on waiting for other people to stop slavery."⁹⁸

Ms. Griffin continues to describe Nat Turner's legacy:

"More and more slaves risked trying to escape. People did not forget Nat."⁹⁹

Ms. Griffin portrays Nat as a freedom fighter for all Black people. She adds meaning and context to Turner's revolt and portrays him as the hero that he was.

Phoebe and the General is based on the true story of 13-year-old Phoebe Fraunces whose father operated a tavern in colonial America. He overhears a plot to assassinate George Washington and arranges for Phoebe to work in the kitchen at Washington's home. She acts as a spy and successfully discovers the would-be assassins.

Mr. Fraunces' commentary on slavery is a rare and revealing passage in children's literature:

"You know, Phoebe," he said, "'tis a strange freedom we're fighting for, alongside George Washington." Phoebe nodded. She knew what her father meant. How could a man lead an army to win freedom if he himself owned slaves. For General Washington did own slaves. It was said he treated them well. But still, they were slaves. "And 'tis stranger yet that you and I will save him." Samuel went on. "And those of us will have no share in that freedom he's fighting for!"¹⁰⁰

Ms. Griffin's books did not receive widespread attention, perhaps because their honesty and realism of true historical events was not consistent with what was being taught in social studies and history textbooks. This is unfortunate because these books provide students with a different perspective on American history. Ms. Griffin's

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

books also give Black children two heroes and one heroine; in fact, the Fraunces' are American heroes.

Marl Evans writes of another Black American in her **J.D.**, a collection of four stories about J.D., a Black child who lives in a housing project:

"J.D. lived at 817 Salem Court, Apartment #302. Salem Court was named after a Black hero, Peter Salem. Salem was a brave man who fought heroically in the battle of Bunker Hill."¹⁰¹

Other authors who have written outstanding books for this age group are:

Virginia Hamilton, **Zeely, Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush, M.C. Higgins the Great, The House of Dies Drear, A Little Love**; Sharon Bell Mathis, **Listen for the Fig Tree, A Teacup Full of Roses**; June Jordan, **His Own Where**; Eloise Greenfield, **Sister, Talk About a Family**; Ernest Gaines, **The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman**; Arna Bontemps, **Black Thunder, The Old South**; and John Oliver Killens, **Youngblood**.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain is one of the most discussed books in terms of whether or not it should be included in the high school curriculum. Teachers need to be cognizant of the problems with Twain's characterization of Jim and his relationship to whites. Jim is depicted as amusing, dumb and childlike. He depends on Huck for leadership and the normal relationship between adult and child is reversed. Huck displays adult characteristics while Jim acts like the child. This same reversal of roles is seen in Theodore Taylor's **The Cay** (1969). The use of the word "nigger" throughout the book is further used to define Jim and all Black people as inferior, and less than human. Inclusion of this book in the curriculum should be carefully considered.

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

Stories such as **Huckleberry Finn** reinforce society's view and treatment of Black men as "boys." Similar characterizations of Black men exist in Harriet B. Stowe's **Uncle Tom's Cabin** and Theodore Taylor's **The Cay** (1969). The negative images these books portray outweigh any literary qualities they may have.

ILLUSTRATORS

The impact of Black children's literature is in part due to rich and vibrant illustrations by Black artists. Their drawings breathe life into the words of African-American authors as they creatively portray the beauty of Black people and Black life. The drawings alone merit study for their quality is unsurpassed in children's literature.

Tom Feelings is the first Black illustrator of children's books to command an appreciable audience. He describes his art using words and pictures in his autobiography **Black Pilgrimage**. His first commercial venture in the 1950's was a comic strip called **Tommy Traveler in the World of Negro History**. He later illustrated **Crispus Attucks**, a historical comic book in the Golden Legacy series. Feelings has illustrated a long list of books: **Moja Means One, Jambo Means Hello, Zamani Goes to Market, Daydreamers, To Be A Slave, Black Folktales, Something on My Mind, African Crafts, Bolan and the Oba's Drummers, When the Stories Were Soft: East African Fireside Tales, Black is the Color, and The Black Child.**

Jerry Pinkney is best-known for drawing the U.S. Postal Service's Black Heritage stamp series. He has illustrated: **The Adventures of Spider, More Adventures of Spider, Apples on a Stick, Ji-Nongo-Nongo Means Riddles, Song of the Trees, and J.D.**

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

John Steptoe has written and illustrated: **Stevie, My Special Best Words, Birthday, Train Ride, Daddy is a Monster Sometimes, Uptown,** and **Marcia**. His other credits include **All Us Come Cross the Water** (Clifton) and **Mother Crocodile** (Guy).

Carole Byard's drawings send powerful visual messages, she has illustrated: **Africa Dream, Cornrows, Grandmama's Joy,** and **Three African Tales**.

Leo Dillon's colorful illustrations have won several Caldecott awards: **Ashanti to Zulu, Children of the Sun, Who's in Rabbit's House, Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears,** and **Honey I Love**.

SUMMARY

African-American literature is a celebration of the human spirit. Black writers have used their skills to tell the world about the beauty and pain of Black life. This essay has been about that African spirit and how it continues to live in African-American language and literature. Black children can gain sustenance and pride from this spirit and non-Blacks can learn to respect and acknowledge this spirit, for their lives too have been enriched by its presence.

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AUTHOR: Harris

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AUTHOR: Harris

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AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

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AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

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AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

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AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

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AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

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AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

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AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

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AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

APPENDIX C

C: AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS

The following list is from the Portland Public Schools 1981 Audiovisual Catalogue and the 1984 Cumulative Supplement Guide and is indexed under the same subject headings.

GUIDE TO ABBREVIATIONS

F	Film	FS/R	Filmstrip/Record
FS	Filmstrip	FS/C	Filmstrip/Cassette
PR	Phonograph Record	Kit	Kits
CT	Cassette Tape	VT	Video Tape

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

APPENDIX C (cont'd)

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Amos Fortune, Free Man
R 00013 PR (3-8)

Anthology of Negro Poetry for Young People
R 00016 PR (4-8)

Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions
X 01890 FS/C (4-12)

Corduroy
X 00300 FS/R (K-3)

Snowy Day
A 01336 F (K-3)

Whistle for Willie
A 01633 F (K-3)

FABLES

Aesop's Fables I
X 00014 FS/C (K-3)

Aesop's Fables II
X 02279 FS/C (K-3)

FOLKLORE AND FAIRY TALES

African Folk Tales
X 01572 FS/C (K-6)

African Folk Tales
X 00024 FS/R (4-6)

African Folk Tales
A 02333 FS/C (3-8)

Anansi
A 00057 F (4-10)

Anansi the Spider
X 01298 FS/C (1-6)

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

APPENDIX C (co

FOLKLORE AND FAIRY TALES (cont'd)

The Dancing Lion: An African Folk Tale

A 02117 F (3-5)

Folk Tales of the Tribes of Africa

R 00121 PR (4-8)

John Henry: An American Legend

X 00652 FS/R (7-12

)

Legends and Tales of Africa

T 00278 CT (2-6)

The Legend of John Henry

A 00782 F (1-6)

Stories from Other Lands: African Folk Tales

01034 FS/R (2-6)

A Story, A Story

A 01387 F (1-3)

Tayo: A Nigerian Folktale

X 01064 FS/R (3-6)

Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears

J 02317 KIT (K-2)

Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears

X 01717 FS/C (K-4)

BIOGRAPHY

Dimensions in Reading: We Are Black

K 00055 KIT (4-12)

Gordon Parks' A Choice of Weapons

R 00128 PR (7-12)

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

K 02241 KIT (9-12)

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

APPENDIX C (cont'd)

A Slave's Story: Running a Thousand Miles to Freedom
B 02706 F (9-12)

The Weapons of Gordon Parks
B 03186 F (7-12)

DRAMA

From Jumpstreet 8: Black Influence in Theatre and Film
V 00289 VT (9-12)

To Be Young, Gifted and Black
V 00541 VT (11-12)

LITERATURE

Black Poets
1 00764 CT (5-8)

The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond
X 00541 FS/R (7-12)

Harlem Renaissance: The Black Poets
B 01286 F (7-12)

Langston Hughes
B 03451 F (7-12)

Native Son
K 02248 KIT (11-12)

Poetry by Americans: James Weldon Johnson
B 03757 F (7-12)

The Search for Black Identity: Malcolm X
X 00964 F (7-12)

READING

First Concepts: African AB
L 00625 FS (K-3)

INDEX

A			
Achebe, Chinua	LA-7, LA-23	Biblical Psalm	LA-17 - LA-18
Aesop	LA-21	Biko, Steve	LA-24
Afer, Publius Terentius	LA-21	Bland, James A.	LA-73
African:		Bleeker, W.H.	LA-9
Culture, Oral Tradition	LA-3 - LA-5	Boas, Franz	LA-60 - LA-61
Literature, Contemporary	LA-23 - LA-25	Bontemps, Arna	LA-58, LA-61, LA-70, LA-72, LA-73, LA-80
Origin of Civilization	LA-9	Book of the Dead	LA-15 - LA-18
Writers of the Ancient World	LA-21 - LA-23	Brawley, Benjamin	LA-53
African-American:		Breasted, James H.	LA-13
Child, Communication Style	LA-30 - LA-33	Brewer, J. Mason	LA-1
in Children's Literature	LA-67 - LA-70	Brooks, Gwendolyn	LA-62
Prior to 1950		Brown, Claude	LA-66
Literature, Misconceptions	LA-2 - LA-3	Brown, Sterling	LA-53, LA-58 - LA-59
on Study of		Brown, William Wells	LA-51
Literature, Survey of	LA-41 - LA-67	Budge	LA-16
Speech, The Development of	LA-26 - LA-30	Bullins, Ed	LA-66
Speech, Feature of	LA-30 - LA-33	Bushman	LA-9, LA-10
Africanisms, English Language	LA-33 - LA-38	Byard, Carole	LA-82
Africanisms, Gullah	LA-33		
Ahrnose	LA-14	C	
Akbar, Naim	LA-30, LA-32	Carmichael, Stokely	LA-66
Akhenaten	LA-14	Cesaire, Aime	LA-24, LA-25
Al-Sadi, Abd Al-Rahman	LA-22	Champollion	LA-21
Allen, Annie	LA-62	Chestnutt, Charles Waddell	LA-52, LA-53, LA-55
Amina (Queen)	LA-22	Churchill, Winston	LA-56
Ananse	LA-5	Cinque, Joseph	LA-27
Anderson, Sherwood	LA-60	Clarke, John Henrik	LA-22
Arkhurst, Joyce Cooper	LA-5	Clifton, Lucille	LA-74, LA-75 - LA-76
Armah, Ayi Kwei	LA-23, LA-24	Cornish, Samuel E.	LA-49
Autobiographies	LA-47 - LA-48, LA-75	Cortez, Jayne	LA-65 Cullen, LA-57, LA-74
		Countee	LA-57, LA-74
B		Cunard, Nancy	LA-60
Baba, Ahmed	LA-22	Cuney, Waring	LA-58
Baldwin, James	LA-63 - LA-64		
Bambara, Toni Cade	LA-67	D	
Bannerman, Helen	LA-68	Dadie, Bernard	LA-25
Bantu Language	LA-28, LA-34	Dalcour, Pierre	LA-46
Baraka, Amina	LA-67	Damas, Leon	LA-25
Baraka, Amiri	LA-65, LA-66, LA-67	Dawsen, Charles C	LA-69
Bell, Roseann P.	LA-67	Debrosses, Nelson	LA-46
Ben Jochannan, Yosef	LA-77	Demotic Script	LA-21
		Depestre, Rene	LA-25
		Diaspora	LA-23
		Didactic (Wisdom Literature)	LA-12
		Dillard, J.L.	LA-36, LA-37
		Dillon, Leo	LA-82

INDEX

Diop, Birago	LA-5, LA-25	Gould, Jean	LA-53
Diop, Cheikh Anta	LA-9, LA-26	Graham, Shirley	LA-73
Diop, David	LA-25	Greenfield, Eloise	LA-74, LA-77, LA-80
Dodson, Owen	LA-63	Griffin, Judith Berry	LA-78 - LA-80
Douglass, Frederick	LA-47, LA-65	Griot	LA-3, LA-4, LA-13
DuBois, Felix	LA-22	Gullah	LA-33
DuBois, W.E.B.	LA-39, LA-40, LA-51, LA-54, LA-65, LA-70	Guy, Rosa	LA-5
Dumas, Fils, Alexandre	LA-26	Gwaltney, John	LA-59
Dumas, Henry	LA-65		
Dumas, Pere, Alexandre	LA-26		H
Dunbar, Paul Laurence	LA-38, LA-46, LA-52, LA-53, LA-55	Hall, Gloria T.	LA-67
		Hamilton, Virginia	LA-80
		Hammon, Briton	LA-47
E		Hammon, Jupiter	LA-43 - LA-44
Egyptian Literacy Origins	LA-12 - LA-19	Hancock, John	LA-42
Ellison, Ralph	LA-63	Hannibal, Abraham	LA-25
Evans, Mari	LA-65, LA-67, LA-74, LA-77, LA-80	Hansberry, Lorraine	LA-64
		Harkhuf	LA-10
		Harlem Renaissance	LA-53, LA-54 - LA-60, LA-74
F		Harris, Joel Chandler	LA-52
Fair, Ronald	LA-66	Hatshepsut	LA-14, LA-15
Fanon Research and Development Institute	LA-29	Hausa Tradition	LA-22
Fanon, Frantz	LA-26, LA-29	Hayden, Robert	LA-63
Fauset, Arthur H.	LA-69, LA-70, LA-74	Hieratic Script	LA-20
Fauset, Jessie Redmond	LA-54, LA-58	Hieroglyphs	LA-20 - LA-21
Feelings, Tom	LA-81	Himes, Chester	LA-63
Feelings, Muriel	LA-76	Horton, George Moses	LA-44 - LA-45, LA-50
Fisher, Rudolph	LA-54, LA-58	Howells, William Dean	LA-52
Fisk Jubilee Singers	LA-40	Hughes, Langston	LA-53, LA-54, LA-55, LA-56, LA-58, LA-59, LA-60, LA-61, LA-64, LA-70, LA-72, LA-74
Flashback	LA-13		
Folktales	LA-5 - LA-6	Hunter, Kristin	LA-66
Frank, Waldo	LA-60	Hurston, Zora Neale	LA-60
Franklin, John Hope	LA-58	Hutchinson, Thomas	LA-42
Fraunces, Phoebe	LA-79	Hyksos	LA-14
Frobenius, Leo	LA-10		
Fuller, Hoyt W.	LA-24		I
		Illustrators	LA-81 - LA-82
G		Ink	LA-20
Gaines, Ernest	LA-80	Instructions in Wisdom	LA-12
Garrett, Jimmy	LA-66		
Garvey, Marcus Mosiah	LA-54, LA-55, LA-58		J
Gates, Henry Louis	LA-51		
Ghana, Empire	LA-21	Jackson, Jesse	LA-37
		Jefferson, Thomas	LA-42

INDEX

Jenne	LA-21	Mayfield, Julian	LA-63
Joans, Ted	LA-65	McKay, Claude	LA-54, LA-56, LA-74
Johnson, Georgia Douglas	LA-58, LA-70	Menes	LA-12
Johnson, James Weldon L	A-35, LA-36, LA-38, LA-57, LA-70	Messianic Prophecy	LA-13
Johnson, John Rosamond	LA-57	Middle Kingdom	LA-12 - LA-13
Jordan, June	LA-80	Morrison, Toni	LA-67
		Mphahlele, Ezekiel	LA-24
K		N	
Kanem-Bornu	LA-21, LA-22	Narratives, Slave	LA-47
Kano Chronicle	LA-22	Native Son	LA-61
Karenga, Ron	LA-19	Neal, Larry	LA-65
Kati, Mahmud	LA-22	Negative Confessions	LA-16 - LA-17
Keats, John	LA-57	Negritude	LA-24 - LA-25
Kemble, Fanny	LA-36 - LA-37	New Kingdom	LA-14 - LA-15, LA-21
Kennedy, Adrienne	LA-66	Newsome, Effie Lee	LA-70
Killens, John Oliver	LA-80	Nobles, Wade	LA-29
King, Jr., Martin Luther	LA-37, LA-48, LA-66		
Koumba, Amadou	LA-5	O	
Kouyate, Mamadou	LA-4	O'Neill, Eugene	LA-60
		Oculi, Okello	LA-23
L		Odinga, Oginga	LA-24
Laleau, Leon	LA-25	Old Kingdom	LA-12, LA-20
Lanusse, Armand	LA-46	Oral Tradition	LA-2, LA-3 - LA-5
Larsen, Nella	LA-54, LA-58		
Late Kingdom	LA-19	P	
Lee, Ulysses	LA-59	Page, Thomas Nelson	LA-52
Lerner, Gerda	LA-67	Papyrus of Ani	LA-16
Lester, Julius	LA-72	Parker, Bettye J.	LA-67
Literary Origins, Egyptian	LA-12 - LA-19	Petosiris	LA-17
Literature, Children	LA-77 - LA-81	Petry, Ann	LA-63
Literature, Contemporary	LA-74 - LA-77	Pinkney, Jerry	LA-81
Black Children		Price, Christine	LA-9
Locke, Alain's	LA-54, LA-65	Prophecies of Neferti	LA-12
		Protestation of Innocence	LA-16 - LA-17
M		(Negative Confessions)	
Madhubuti, Haki	LA-65	Proverbs: African	LA-6 - LA-7
Malcolm X	LA-37, LA-64	Ptahhotep, Instruction of	LA-12
Mali, Empire	LA-21	Pushkin, Alexander S.	LA-25
Mandela, Nelson	LA-24	Pyramid Texts	LA-16
Mandingo Language	LA-28		
Maran, Rene	LA-25	R	
Marrant, John	LA-47	Randall, Dudley	LA-65
Marshall, Paule	LA-66	Riddles, African	LA-7 - LA-8
Mathis, Sharon Bell	LA-80	Riquet, Nicol	LA-46

INDEX

Robeson, Paul	LA-65, LA-74	Terry, Lucy	LA-43
Robinson, William H.	LA-46	Theban Recension	LA-15, LA-16
Rock Paintings	LA-9 - LA-11	Thiongo, Ngugi wa	LA-24, LA-64 - LA-65
Rogers, J.A.	LA-73	Thurman, Wallace	LA-54, LA-58
Romantic Verses	LA-15	Thutmose	LA-14 Timbuktu LA-21
Roumain, Jacques	LA-25, LA-59, LA-60	Tirolien, Guy	LA-25
Ruggles, David	LA-49	Toomer, Jean	LA-59
Russwurm, John B.	LA-49	Trotter, William Monroe	LA-51
		Troupe, Quincy	LA-65
	S	Turner, Darwin	T. LA-66
Saite Recension	LA-16	Turner, Lorenzo	LA-33
Sanchez, Sonia	LA-65	Turner, Nat	LA-78, LA-79
Schwaller de Lubicz, Isha	LA-19	Twain, Mark	LA-80
Scott, Patricia Bell	LA-67		
Sejour, Victor	LA-46		U
Senghor, Leopold	LA-25	University of Sankore	LA-22
Shabaka Stone	LA-19		
Shackelford, Jane D.	LA-69, LA-70		V
Shetfall, Beverly Guy	LA-67	Vass, Winifred	LA-28
Simple, Jesse B.	LA-56	Vassa, Gustavus	LA-47
Smith, Barbara	LA-67	Vechten, Carl Van	LA-60
Smitherman, Geneva	LA-37		
Songhay Empire	LA-21		W
Soyinka, Wole	LA-24	Wagner, Jean	LA-53
Speech:		Wahungrue	LA-10
Development of	LA-26 - LA-30	Walker, Alice	LA-61, LA-67
Features	LA-30 - LA-33	Walker, David	LA-44, LA-49, LA-50, LA-65
Spirituals	LA-38 - LA-40	Walker, Margaret	LA-62
Star of Zion	LA-49	Washington, Mary Helen	LA-67
Stela (a stone monument)	LA-13	Watkins Harper, Frances Ellen	LA-45
Steptoe, John	LA-74, LA-77, LA-82	Wells, Ida B.	LA-50
Stetson, Erlene	LA-67	West Africa	LA-21 - LA-22
Stowe, Harriet B.	LA-81	Wheatley, John	LA-42
Sundiata (King of Mali)	LA-4	Wheatley, Phillis	LA-42, LA-43, LA-44, LA-45
		Wilson, Harriet E.	LA-51
	T	Woodson, Carter G.	LA-69, LA-73
Ta-Seti	LA-20	Wright, Richard	LA-61 - LA-62
Talking Drums	LA-8 - LA-9	Writing, Development of	LA-19 - LA-21
Tarikh al-Fettach	LA-22		
Tarikh-es-Sudan	LA-22		Y
Tate, Claudia	LA-67	Yarbrough, Camille	LA-76
Taylor, Clyde	LA-4, LA-5, LA-28 - LA-29, LA-55	Yerby, Frank	LA-63
Taylor, Mildred D.	LA-77, LA-78		
Taylor, Theodore	LA-80, LA-81		
Ten Commandments	LA-17		
Terence	LA-21		

AUTHOR: Harris

SUBJECT: Language Arts

INDEX

<p style="text-align: center;">Z</p> <p>Zaria Chronicle 1218C</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">LA-22</p>
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