

# HARLEM RENAISSANCE ACTIVITIES

## The Renaissance of Harlem: Forming Identities – Activity Pages

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*Aspects of Negro Life, (Panel 3) By Douglas, Aaron. 1934.*  
[https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR\\_103\\_41822000904639.](https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000904639)

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## **ACTIVITIES FOR THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE**

- Create collage representations of their lives and/or communities using scissors and glue to cut and paste different images and words to construction paper.
- Create short poems and/or stories to coincide with their collage creations.
- Research and discover other prominent Harlem Renaissance figures.

## ACTIVITY 1:

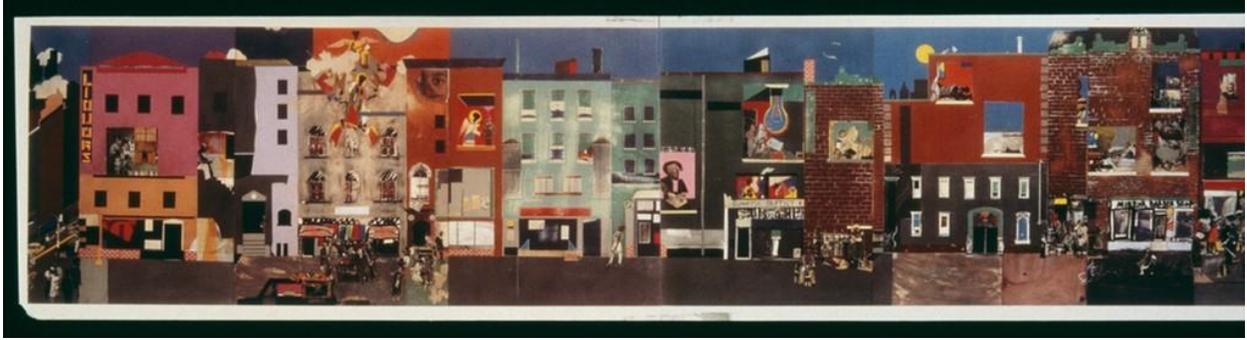
### ROMARE BEARDEN (1911 -1988) - LIFE IN COLLAGE

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Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, Romare Bearden was the only child of Bessye Johnson Bearden, the first president of the Negro Women's Democratic Association, and Richard Howard, a sanitation inspector. During the formative years of the Harlem Renaissance in Bearden's apartment on West 131<sup>st</sup> street in Harlem was a frequent gathering space for African American intellectuals like W. E. B. Du Bois and artists such as Arron Douglas. The location of Bearden's apartment, located near popular night spots, made it easy for the artist to become immersed in jazz and Blues. Bearden

had not considered becoming a professional artist upon entering New York University where he earned a B. S. in mathematics in 1935. It was not until he met a group of African American artists who later would become known as the Harlem Artists Guild that he began seriously doing art. It was during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s that Bearden started focusing on how it could contribute to the movement while, making it the most important stage within the artist's career.



*(The) Block I* by Romare Howard Bearden, (1911-1988). 1971) Place: Metropolitan Museum of Art.  
[https://library.artstor.org/asset/ABEARDENIG\\_10313651032](https://library.artstor.org/asset/ABEARDENIG_10313651032).

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## COLLAGES

What gave these collages special power was their size. Originally they were no larger than 14 by 18 inches, but striving for monumentality, Bearden had them photographed and blown up to large black and white sheets, which he named 'Projections.' Their size was typically six by eight feet or four by five feet. . . Reviewers hailed them as 'startling,' 'emphatic,' 'moving,' 'memorable' and 'propagandistic in the best sense.'

*Michael Brenson*

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## What is Collage?

The term describes both the resulting work and the technique in which paper, fabric, photographs, and other material are arranged and attached to a supported surface.



*Chicago Grand Terrace* by Romare Howard Bearden, (1964)  
[https://library.artstor.org/asset/ABEARDENIG\\_10313650560](https://library.artstor.org/asset/ABEARDENIG_10313650560).



*The Train* by Bearden, Romare Howard 1974.  
[https://library.artstor.org/asset/ABEARDENIG\\_10313651209](https://library.artstor.org/asset/ABEARDENIG_10313651209).



*(The) Blues by Romare Bearden (1974)*

[https://library.artstor.org/asset/ABEARDENIG\\_10313650488](https://library.artstor.org/asset/ABEARDENIG_10313650488).



*Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong* By Romare Howard Bearden.

Graphic Design and Illustration. [https://library.artstor.org/asset/LARRY\\_QUALLS\\_1039764831](https://library.artstor.org/asset/LARRY_QUALLS_1039764831).



*Prevalence of Ritual: Tidings, Prevalence of Ritual.* by Romare Bearden

[https://library.artstor.org/asset/ABEARDENIG\\_10313650844](https://library.artstor.org/asset/ABEARDENIG_10313650844).

- Utilizing African American cultural history, literature, and personal memories as a source for his subject matter; Bearden places the lives of blacks in context with universal themes.
- Bearden's style was influenced by a variety of sources, including African sculpture, Western European art, music (especially jazz and Blues), as well as the art of contemporaries in Mexico and America.
- Most famous for his innovative and creative collage work; Bearden also made paintings in gouache, watercolors, and oil, as well as monotypes, murals, edition prints, and one assemblage sculpture.

**Prompt:** Well known for his collage work, Romare Bearden utilized a variety of materials, including magazine cut outs, to create meaningful and informative art pieces. Bearden utilized his art to not only express himself, but as a means to represent the community he was a part of. *Like the intellectuals and artists of the Harlem Renaissance, utilize your own hands to create representations of your own community and feelings!*

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### Activity 1: ART is like a Collage (Romare Bearden)

- **Step 1:** Gather construction paper, scissors, glue, old magazines, or other old pictures and material you are no longer using along with any other art coloring utensils you want to use.
- **Step 2:** With your materials nearby, look through the magazines or whatever images you have pulled for the project and look for pictures that you feel represent you, your feelings, your family, or your community.
- **Step 3:** Organize your photos into a proper scene before you decide to glue any of the pieces down.
- **Step 4:** Use your coloring utensils (markers, crayons, colored pencils, etc.) to add in any other images you would want to incorporate.

#### **Questions to consider while working:**

*What does your community, neighborhood, or family look like to you?*

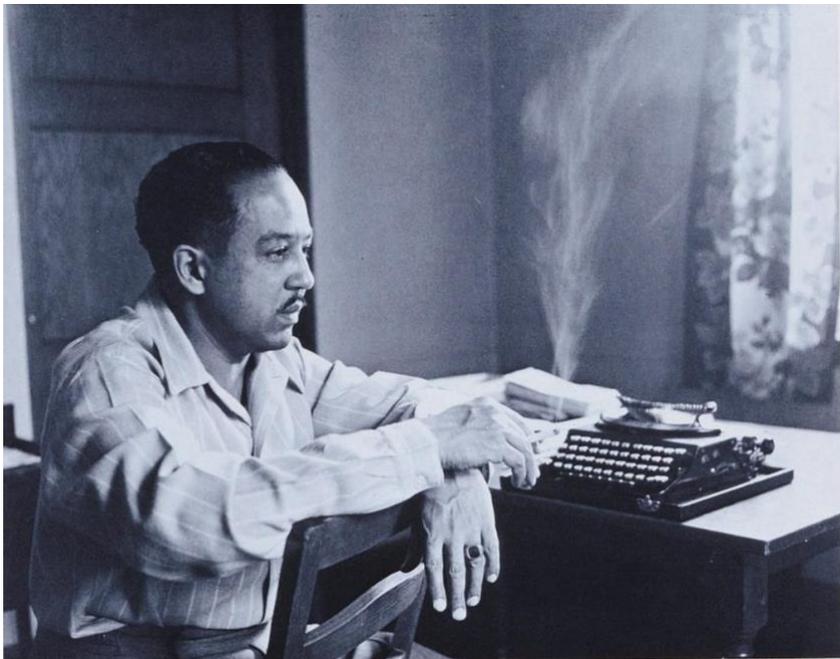
*What makes your community, neighborhood, or family unique?*

## ACTIVITY 2:

### LANGSTON HUGHES (1902-1967) - POETRY IN MOTION

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An important literary figure within American history and a central component to the Harlem Renaissance. Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri though lived with his grandmother (who was prominent within the African American community there) in Lawrence, Kansas until he was thirteen. When his grandmother died he went to live with



his mother in Lincoln, Illinois. By the time he reached high school, Hughes's talent as a writer was well known. After graduating high school Hughes went to Mexico to visit his father, on the train there he wrote his famous poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers". It wasn't long then after Hughes left Columbia

University that he became an integral part of the Harlem scene. It is through Hughes's autobiography, *The Big Sea*, that we learned much about the Harlem Renaissance and some of its other key players like Countee Cullen, W. E. B. Du Bois, and James Weldon

Johnson. [List of Langston Hughes Poems](#)

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**Prompt:** An exceptional writer dedicated to an honest portrayal of the experiences and lives of African Americans; Hughes wrote a lot of poetry about the black community. *Like Langston Hughes and many other prevalent writers of the movement, utilize your own hands to create your own meaningful poetry.*

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## Proposed Activity 2: Writing like Mr. Hughes (Langston Hughes)

an excerpt from "**The Negro Speaks of Rivers**" (1920)

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.  
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.  
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.  
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

—*in The Weary Blues (1926)*<sup>[46]</sup>

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Concerned with the lives and heritage of African Americans, Hughes’s poem explores the journey of African Americans over the years. Though written in the first person (utilizing the pronoun “I”), the story narrates the diverse and rich history of Africa. Like many other Harlem Renaissance artists and writers, Hughes studied Egyptian works along with other references to African heritage. They were able to use these references in their writing and art to celebrate the diverse and prosperous history African Americans are connected to.

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- **Step 1:** Once you have finished collaging write either a short poem about your work or experience.
- **Step 2:** Write four sentences about your artwork, beginning each line with “I...”

### **Questions to consider while working:**

*What made you choose certain pictures to represent your community or family?*

*What does this artwork mean to you?*

*How does this work represent you, your family, or your community?*

*How does this work make you feel?*

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## **ACTIVITY 3:**

### **RESEARCH & TAKING A STEP FURTHER**

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Perhaps you like playing instruments or singing? Or maybe you want to see other forms of art or poetry? Take a moment to research more about one of the artists, musicians, or writers that you have learned or want to learn about. Or discover a Harlem Renaissance artist you never heard of!

- **Step 1:** Examine and research other Harlem Renaissance artists!

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## **More Resources to Use**

### **Information on the Harlem Renaissance**

- ❖ [Harlem Renaissance Facts](#)

<http://www.american-historama.org/1913-1928-ww1-prohibition-era/harlem-renaissance.htm#:~:text=Facts%20about%20the%20Harlem%20Renaissance%20for%20kids.%20Harlem,and%20geometric%20shapes%20to%20convey%20the%20%22modern%22%20look.>

- ❖ [Harlem Renaissance Facts 2](#)

[https://www.softschools.com/facts/world\\_history/harlem\\_renaissance\\_facts/2890/](https://www.softschools.com/facts/world_history/harlem_renaissance_facts/2890/)

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### **Videos for Kids on the Harlem Renaissance:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBKE--xu\\_NM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBKE--xu_NM)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWMus4KHKx4>