This activity gives you a chance to learn more about your favorite Harlem Renaissance artist. Look at the list of famous artists below, and then read the descriptions about each of them. Which artist sounds the most interesting to you?

After you pick an artist to study, you will need to do some research to find out more information about your artist. Your research may include the use of Web sites, books, encyclopedias, periodicals (magazines, newspapers, journals, etc.), and other sources. At the bottom of this list, there is a selection of resources to get you started!

The Artist Fact Sheet will help you pick out important facts from what you find in your research. Fill in the sheet with the information you find.

Crafts
Faith Ringgold

Painting
Aaron Douglas
Palmer Hayden
William H. Johnson
Lois Mailou Jones
Jacob Lawrence
Archibald J. Motley Jr.

Photography
James Van Der Zee

Poetry & Prose
Countee Cullen
Jessie Redmon Fauset
Langston Hughes
Zora Neale Hurston
James Weldon Johnson
Nella Larsen
Claude McKay
Wallace Thurman
Jean Toomer

Sculpture
Augusta Savage
Crafts

**Faith Ringgold**
born in 1930 in Harlem, New York

Faith Ringgold grew up in Harlem with black culture all around her. Her mother taught her how to sew. Later, she became an artist. Faith makes her art by sewing special quilts that tell a story. Many of her “story quilts” show how black people are often treated unfairly. The idea of telling stories to teach something is not new—it is an ancient tradition to pass on history by telling stories. But Faith’s story quilts are a creative twist on simple oral storytelling, as she makes images of people, places, and things from colorful fabrics and lets those images tell the stories.

Painting

**Aaron Douglas**
born in 1899 in Topeka, Kansas; died in 1979 in Nashville, Tennessee

Aaron Douglas joined the Harlem Renaissance after he left his job teaching drawing in a Kansas high school. He was very interested in African art, and he learned how to draw using different African styles. Aaron became famous for drawing murals that showed what life was like for African Americans. He won many awards and is called “The Father of Black American Art.”

**Palmer Hayden**
born in 1890 in Widewater, Virginia; died in 1973 in New York City

Palmer Hayden was one of Harlem’s most famous artists, but he wasn’t born Palmer Hayden. His parents named him Peyton Cole Hedgeman. Later, Hayden’s name was changed by his sergeant in the Army (during World War I) because the man couldn’t pronounce it.

Palmer Hayden attended New York City’s famous art school Cooper Union. He became one of Harlem’s most famous artists, painting pictures about African folklore and black history. Like Aaron Douglas, Palmer Hayden used different African art styles in his paintings.

**William H. Johnson**
born in 1901 in Florence, South Carolina; died in 1970 on Long Island, New York

When he was young, William Johnson lived in the segregated South. He knew it would be very hard to become a successful black artist in the South. So he moved to Europe, where he studied painting and grew as an artist. After Johnson became a well-known painter, he came back to the United States and moved to Harlem. He was inspired by the rich culture of Harlem and painted many pictures there. Some of these paintings are landscapes of places in Europe, and others are based on African American folklore. Johnson’s art became very popular, especially in New York City.

**Lois Mailou Jones**
born in 1905 in Boston, Massachusetts; died in 1998 in Washington, D.C.
When she was a young girl, Lois Jones knew that she wanted to be an artist one day. She went to art school, where she learned how to paint. Lois was a very good artist, but it was not easy for her because she was black and a woman. Lois decided to keep her identity a secret by asking friends to deliver her artwork. She even asked friends to accept art awards for her. Later, when Lois’s art became popular, she didn’t need to keep her secret anymore. People finally knew that Lois Mailou Jones was a great artist.

**Jacob Lawrence**  
born in 1917 in Atlantic City, New Jersey; died in 2000 in Seattle, Washington

Jacob Lawrence joined the American art world when his family moved to Harlem in 1926. Jacob liked to paint murals in a series that told a story. He used strong colors and flat figures that described black lives and history. Jacob learned this style of painting by studying ancient Egyptian and European medieval art. One of Jacob’s most famous series is titled *The Migration of the Negro*. This series includes 60 paintings that show blacks moving from the South to the North in hopes of finding a better life.

**Archibald J. Motley Jr.**  
born in 1891 in New Orleans, Louisiana; died in 1980 in Chicago, Illinois

Archibald Motley Jr. was part of the Harlem Renaissance even though he never lived in or near Harlem. Archibald Motley lived in Chicago, where he painted pictures of the everyday life of African Americans. Many of these African Americans lived in a community called the “black belt” of Chicago. Archibald sometimes painted other subjects, too. One of his most famous paintings is of a French café in Paris.

**Photography**

**James Van Der Zee**  
born in 1886 in Lenox, Massachusetts; died in 1983 in Washington, D.C.

James Van Der Zee was a man with many talents. When he was a young man, James Van Der Zee was a professional musician. He played the violin and the piano very well. James also loved photography, and he taught himself how to use the camera to make art. In 1916, James Van Der Zee opened his own photography studio in Harlem. He spent nearly 70 years taking photos of African American life, but his photos of funerals were especially well-known.

**Poetry & Prose**

**Countee Cullen**  
born in 1903 in New York, New York; died in 1946 in New York, New York

Countee Cullen was an outstanding student in every school he attended. He started writing poetry when he was 14. Later, at New York University he wrote most of the poems for his first three published collections of poems, *Color*, *Copper Sun*, and *The Ballad of the Brown Girl*. Even before he enrolled at Harvard he had become one of the most respected leaders of the Harlem Renaissance and the most popular black poet in America. He wrote about African American life and racism, but he also wrote about traditional subjects, such as love and nature. He wanted to be known as a poet, not an African American poet, because he thought that black artists had to write beyond their African American experience.
**Jessie Redmon Fauset**  
born in 1882 Fredericksville, New Jersey; died in 1961 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Jessie Fauset was another Harlem Renaissance artist who had a very good education. She graduated from university and became a high school teacher in Washington, D.C. Later, Jessie became an editor of *The Crisis*, a Harlem magazine that printed the work of Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and other Renaissance artists. Jessie Fauset also wrote short stories, poems, and novels.

**Langston Hughes**  
born in 1902 in Joplin, Missouri; died in 1967 in Harlem, New York

Langston Hughes was one of the most famous writers of the Harlem Renaissance. He was a poet all his life, but he also wrote plays, short stories, and children’s books. Langston liked to write about the everyday life of average African Americans. He also liked to write the way African Americans talked. Langston always said that his life was the same as the lives of other African Americans, so when he was writing about them, Langston was writing about himself, too.

**Zora Neale Hurston**  
born in 1891 in Notasaluga, Alabama, died in 1960 in Fort Pierce, Florida

Zora Neal Hurston moved to Harlem when her first story, “Drenched in Light,” became popular. She wanted to keep on writing, but she also wanted to go to college (she attended Howard University) and study about people and their different cultures. Zora Hurston learned many interesting things and had many interesting ideas of her own. The other Harlem artists did not always agree with her ideas, but she was an important leader in the Harlem Renaissance.

**James Weldon Johnson**  
born in 1871 in Jacksonville, Florida; died in 1938 near Wiscasset, Maine

James Weldon Johnson grew up in Florida. He studied to become a lawyer, and in 1897, James became the first African American lawyer in Florida. James was also interested in music, and in 1901, he moved to New York City to write songs with his brother. The brothers wrote “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing.” This song was called the “black national anthem.” In his later life, James Johnson worked for presidents Roosevelt and Taft.

**Nella Larsen**  
born in 1891 in Chicago, Illinois; died in 1964 in Harlem, New York

When Nella Larsen was a young girl, she loved to read. When she grew up, Nella got a job as a nurse in a hospital but loved books so much that she decided to quit her job as a nurse to become a librarian in Harlem. Nella also started writing her own short stories and novels. Soon Nella became friends with other Harlem writers, and more and more of her work was published. She left her job as a librarian and then spent all her time writing. In 1930, Nella Larsen became the first black woman to win a Guggenheim Award for writing.
Claude McKay
born in 1890 in Sunny Ville, Jamaica; died in 1948 in Chicago, Illinois

Claude McKay did not go to school when he was young. Instead, Claude’s older brother gave Claude lessons at their home in Jamaica, in the West Indies. When he grew up, Claude worked as a policeman. He also wrote poetry. Later, Claude decided to come to the United States to study. It was a new experience for Claude, but it was not a happy one. He discovered that many American people were prejudiced. They treated him badly because of the color of his skin. Claude wrote poems about his experiences with prejudice and racism. He also wrote a novel called *Home to Harlem*, which became a best-seller.

Wallace Thurman
born in 1902 in Salt Lake City, Utah; died in 1934 New York, New York

Wallace Thurman grew up in Utah and California, far away from Harlem. When he finished college, Wallace decided to move to Harlem. Wallace loved to write, and there were many other black writers and artists there. Wallace Thurman wrote poems, novels and plays. One of his most popular plays, *Harlem*, is about African American life.

Jean Toomer

Jean Toomer was a writer who grew up in a multiracial family. All his life, people treated Jean unfairly. Some people were prejudiced against him because he was black, and other people did not treat him well because they thought he looked white. Jean Toomer thought that people should just think of him as an American.

Sculpture

Augusta Savage
born in 1892 in Green Coves Spring, Florida; died in 1962 in New York, New York

Augusta Savage grew up in Florida. When she was young, Augusta entered one of her sculptures in an art contest. She won a prize and decided to move to Harlem, where she could be surrounded by black culture and artists. In Harlem, Augusta made many sculptures of famous black leaders like W.E.B. DuBois and Frederick Douglass. Augusta also loved teaching children about art because she felt children were natural artists.

You may find the following books and Internet sites helpful as you begin your research!

**Children’s Reference Books**


Bolden, Tonya. *Tell All the Children Our Story: Memories and Mementoes of Being*


General Reference Web Sites

Grolier Online
http://go.grolier.com

The Art Institute of Chicago-Art Access
www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_AfAm/pages/AfAm_6.shtml

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (Harlem 1900–1940)
www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Harlem/timex/timeline.html

The Academy of American Poets
www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmID=73

Modern American Poetry
www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/