

Educator's Guide For Great African American Authors

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These programs are closed-captioned.

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MATERIALS IN THE SERIES

Educator's Guide – This Educator's Guide has been prepared to aid educators in utilizing materials contained within this series. In addition to this introductory material, the guide contains the following:

- Suggested Instructional Notes
- Student Learning Goals

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

It is suggested that you preview the series and read the Student Goals and Educator Points. By doing so, you will become familiar with the materials and be better prepared to adapt the series to the needs of your class. Please note that each program is set up to be played continuously and you will probably find it best to follow the series and the programs in the order in which they are presented, but this is not necessary. Each program is divided into chapters, which can be accessed separately. In this way each chapter can be played and studied individually. It is also suggested that the series presentation take place before the entire class and under your direction. As you review the instructional programs outlined in the Educator's Guide, you may find it necessary to make some changes, deletions, or additions to fit the specific needs of your students.

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF SERIES

Great African American Authors is a new approach to presenting, in a unique way, the literary tradition of African American authors. The series is designed to present Black writers and their works in a way that promotes successful student learning. In broad terms African American literature is the literature of Americans of African descent. In the 21st century it is taught in every university as an integral part of American literature, and while it has generally focused on the role of Blacks within the larger American community, it is also the quintessential story of what it means to be a Black woman or man in America. It speaks to what it means to be free, democratic and equal and to be a part of the American melting pot. As the place of African Americans has changed over the past 400 years, so has their literature - from pre-Revolutionary War poetry and sermons, to ante-Civil War slave narratives, to Jim Crow Era segregation and discrimination issues, to Black rights in the Civil Rights period, to the Black Artists movement and to the Black New Wave of the 21st Century. Utilizing experts on Black culture and literature, *Great African American Authors* covers all the great writers from these periods. The series begins with the genesis of Black literature, including the poets Jupiter Hammon, Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass's immortal autobiography, *My Bondage and my Freedom*. The series continues with growth of Black writers through the Jim Crow Era, including Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. The next two programs look at the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on Black literature and authors, such as Langston Hughes, Alain Locke and Zora Neale Hurston. Next, the series explores the Black Arts movement of the late 20th Century with authors like Alice Walker, Alex Haley and Toni Morrison. Finally the series ends with the Black New Wave, which introduces such exciting talents as Natasha Tretheway, Olympia Vernon and Tony Medina.

The eight programs are laid out so they can be viewed in their entirety, or by selecting individual chapters, be viewed separately. Each chapter presents a story of great works

and authors. Most importantly, literary themes and figures are clearly presented using state of the art visuals that make learning easy and fun.

Below is a list of the series' programs and their chapters. Using these programs, educators can create a lesson plan to cover the specific issues, themes and historical figures mentioned.

Program 1: 1761 - 1901

- 1761 - Jupiter Hammon, America's First Published Black Writer
- 1773 - Phillis Wheatley Completes Her *Poems on Various Subjects*
- 1855 - Frederick Douglass Publishes *My Bondage and My Freedom*
- 1899 - Paul Laurence Dunbar's 'Sympathy'
- 1901 - Booker T. Washington's Autobiography, *Up From Slavery*

Program 2: 1902 - 1924

- 1903 - W.E.B. Du Bois Pens *The Souls of Black Folk*
- 1912 - James Weldon Johnson Writes About Black Identity
- 1919 - Alain LeRoy Locke, Architect of the Harlem Renaissance
- 1921 - 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers' by Langston Hughes
- 1924 - Alice Dunbar Nelson, Interpreter of Black Culture

Program 3: 1925 - 1937

- 1925 - Countee Cullen Pens 'Heritage'
- 1928 - Jessie Redmon Fauset Publishes *Plum Bun*
- 1932 - Sterling A. Brown, Master of Dialect
- 1936 - Arna Bontemps, *Black Thunder*
- 1937 - Zora Neale Hurston Completes *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Program 4: 1938 - 1953

- 1940 - Richard Wright, Father of Black Protest Fiction
- 1950 - Gwendolyn Brooks, First Black Pulitzer Prize Recipient
- 1953 - Ralph Ellison Wins National Book Award
- 1953 - James Baldwin Writes *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

Program 5: 1954 - 1967

- 1957 - Chester Himes, First Black Crime Fiction Writer
- 1959 - Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* is Produced
- 1965 - *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*
- 1965 - Amiri Baraka, Father of the Black Arts Movement
- 1967 - Nikki Giovanni, "Princess of Black Poetry"

Program 6: 1968 - 1982

- 1969 - Maya Angelou Writes Her Autobiography
- 1972 - Toni Cade Bambara Publishes *Gorilla, My Love*
- 1973 - Alice Childress, *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich*

- 1975 - Ed Bullins Premieres *The Taking of Miss Janie*
- 1976 - Alex Haley's Groundbreaking *Roots*
- 1982 - Gloria Naylor Celebrates the Black Woman

Program 7: 1982 - 1993

- 1982 - Alice Walker Writes *The Color Purple*
- 1987 - Lucille Clifton's Poetry Celebrates the Female Body
- 1987 - August Wilson Wins Pulitzer for *Fences*
- 1988 - Yusef Komunyakaa Pens 'Facing It'
- 1990 - Walter Mosley Introduces Easy Rawlins
- 1993 - Toni Morrison Wins the Nobel Prize in Literature

Program 8: 1993 - Present

- 1993 - Ernest J. Gaines Completes *A Lesson Before Dying*
- 1993 - Rita Dove is Appointed Poet Laureate of the United States
- 2001 - Cornelius Eady Writes *Brutal Imagination*
- 2002 - Suzan-Lori Parks Wins Pulitzer for *Topdog/Underdog*
- 2012 - Natasha Trethewey and the New Wave

SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS FOR GREAT AFRICAN AMERICAN AUTHORS

Program 1: 1761 - 1901

Program one examines the beginning of African American Literature from its roots in slavery and its rich oral tradition.

Chapter one and Chapter two look at the beautiful and striking poetry of two slaves, Jupiter Hammon and Phillis Wheatley.

Frederick Douglass's graphic expose of slavery, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, is discussed in Chapter three.

Chapter four examines the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar, a leader in laying bare the injustice Blacks were suffering in America.

Chapter five depicts the philosophy and writings of Black educator, Booker T. Washington.

Chapter 1: 1761 - Jupiter Hammon Becomes the First Black Published Writer

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- In the 21st Century, African American literature is a part of every major American university's curriculum
- It is a literary tradition that has reinvented itself and evolved with the times
- This culturally rich heritage has always drawn from both the Black oral tradition and the struggle for individual identity that dates back to the era of slavery
- A brief history of Blacks and the beginning of slavery in America

- African Americans are interested in reflecting on the meaning of identity because African Americans are a stigmatized group whose identity is troubled
- In 1761, Jupiter Hammon was the first Black man to be published in America with his poem titled ‘An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries’
 - He was the intrepid poet and preacher
- In 1778, Hammon published another poem ‘An Address to Phillis Wheatley’
- Hammon is best remembered for his rousing speech, “An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York”

Chapter 2: 1773 - Phillis Wheatley Completes Her *Poems on Various Subjects*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- America's great literary tradition traces back to Phillis Wheatley who was a woman living as a slave in Boston, Massachusetts
 - At the age of seven she was sold at a slave auction to the family of John Wheatley
 - Phillis Wheatley possessed a profound intellect
 - She mastered English and was reading the classics in Greek and Latin
 - By thirteen, inspired by the British poet Alexander Pope, she wrote her first poems
- Through her slim volume of poems, titled *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, Phillis Wheatley founded three distinct intellectual movements
 - These are the American poetic tradition, the Black literary tradition, and the women’s literary tradition
- Her poem “On Being Brought from Africa to America” can be seen as deeply ironic and sarcastic
- Because of her intellectual achievements, Phillis was granted her freedom in 1774
- She continued to write until her untimely death at age 31 in 1784

Chapter 3: 1855 - Frederick Douglass Publishes *My Bondage and My Freedom*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- In telling the story of his enslavement and freedom, Frederick Douglass gave to American literature a story that would speak through the ages
- It was Douglass’s autobiography, “My Bondage and My Freedom” published in 1855
- Douglass's personal account galvanized his readers to demand an end to enslavement
- Many Whites and Blacks spoke out against slavery, but Douglass’s personal account created the extraordinary emotion in his readers necessary to bring enslavement to an end
- In the years following the Civil War, Douglass worked tirelessly for the rights of Blacks
- Douglass’s greatest legacy was his writing, which opened a new world of Black literary expression

Chapter 4: 1899 - Paul Laurence Dunbar’s ‘Sympathy’

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Paul Laurence Dunbar was one of America’s early Black literary geniuses, mastering the short story, the novel, and the poem

- His dialect poetry is able to capture the voice of the individual African American male and female who did not have the opportunity to be educated, who lived and loved and experienced life just as dramatically as everyone else
- He wrote about the songs and spirits of his people so that people would know what it meant to be human
- A brief biography of Paul Laurence Dunbar
- He married the famed Black poet Alice Ruth Moore and for a short time they were the Black literary power couple
- He was America's first universal Black writer

Chapter 5: 1901 – Booker T. Washington's Autobiography, *Up From Slavery*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Booker T. Washington was the most influential Black educator of the 19th century
- His philosophy of depending on Whites to free Blacks from racial prejudice had many Black critics who branded Washington and his supporters as 'Uncle Toms'
- Still for Washington, education was the most important piece in the puzzle of racial equality
 - As a result he decided to focus solely on trade education and blue-collar jobs
- Washington was also an eloquent communicator of the Black experience in the second half of 19th Century America
- In 1901 he published his noteworthy autobiography, *Up From Slavery*
 - In *Up From Slavery*, Washington chronicles his life's journey
 - It remained the most popular autobiographical text of a Black man until *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* was published more than sixty years later
- At his death in 1915, he was revered by Blacks who owed him their livelihoods and reviled by other Blacks who felt held back by his "appeasement" policy

Program 2: 1902 - 1924

Program 2 focuses on the struggle by Blacks to find a place and an identity as they migrated from the rural south to the industrialized north at the turn of the 20th Century.

Chapter one looks at the life, philosophy and writings of the great Black intellectual and activist, W.E.B. Du Bois.

Chapter two pays tribute to the author of the Black National Anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, James Weldon Johnson.

The rich literary and artistic triumphs of the Harlem Renaissance are discussed in chapters three, four and five through the works of Alain LeRoy Locke, Langston Hughes and Alice Dunbar Nelson.

Chapter 1: 1903 - W.E.B. Du Bois Writes *The Souls of Black Folk*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- W.E.B. Du Bois founded the NAACP, was the first Black man to receive a doctorate from Harvard University, and was a groundbreaking author

- Du Bois was an innovative thinker on such subjects as how does Black identity relate to a global identity or a global Black identity
- His 1903 book of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk*, would forever change the course of African American literature
 - The book introduces an essential new theme in African American Literature – double consciousness
- In 1910 he founded *The Crisis*, which became an outlet for many talented Black authors from the Harlem Renaissance
- Du Bois also wrote groundbreaking books on the Black experience, including *Black Reconstruction in America* and his autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn*

Chapter 2: 1912 - James Weldon Johnson Writes About Black Identity

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- James Weldon Johnson was a lawyer, diplomat, songwriter, educator and civil rights activist
- A Black renaissance man of letters, he was also an award-winning poet and writer of fiction
- His work elevated the status of Black Americans by exploring the identity of the everyday Black man in mainstream American culture
- He captured this idea in his 1912 masterpiece *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*
 - The book follows the identity struggles of an un-named bi-racial protagonist referred to only as the “Ex-Colored Man”
 - It explores the crisis of identity that’s based upon the absurdity of American race relations and American racial coding
 - The novel gives Blacks a sense of where they were 100 years ago and where they are today
- A brief biography of Johnson
- His works, including *God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* in 1927, *Black Manhattan* and *Negro Americans, What Now?*

Chapter 3: 1919 - Alain LeRoy Locke, Architect of the Harlem Renaissance

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- The Harlem Renaissance was a new and powerful mode of expression of Black culture and society that came about during the Roaring 20s
 - It was originally called the ‘New Negro Movement’
 - It called for art and sculpture and these ideas of the humanities to change the world, in ways that political and social agitation were not going to do
 - As the Harlem Renaissance transformed Black culture and identity, it also revolutionized American culture
- The center of this Renaissance was Harlem, New York, and its architect was Alain LeRoy Locke
- Locke was a Harvard trained educator and philosopher
- His philosophy of cultural pluralism was tailor-made for America’s Roaring 20's
- He demanded that Black artists, writers and composers perform at their highest level in depicting Black life

- Locke’s bold and brilliant book, *The New Negro: An Interpretation* was a remarkable anthology of leading Black fiction, poetry, drama and essays
 - It described the changing state of race relations in the United States
 - Locke wrote in the book's foreword that Black life was "not only establishing new contacts and founding new centers, it is finding a new soul"

Chapter 4: 1921 - ‘The Negro Speaks of Rivers’ by Langston Hughes

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Langston Hughes was a Black poet, playwright, novelist, Civil Rights activist and non-fiction writer
- His predominant themes can be found in his poem, ‘The Negro Speaks of Rivers’
 - They include the celebration of Black identity and the need for people of African descent to elevate themselves above the racial prejudices of everyday American life
- His greatest work includes his striking and inspirational poem, *I, Too, Sing America*
 - The poem is an assertion of identity and of connection to the center of what America is
- Hughes’ inexhaustible writing talents made him “the voice of the Harlem Renaissance
- He celebrated Black life through the written word
- His masterpiece of prose and autobiography, *The Big Sea*, was published in 1940
 - It tells of his life and his rise to become an American and Black literary legend

Chapter 5: 1924 - Alice Dunbar Nelson, Interpreter of Black Culture

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn

- Alice Dunbar Nelson was a writer and activist
- Her literature reflects a time when Black women became organized and were doing work in their communities because they needed to fill in a gap
- At the age of twenty she published her first book of short stories, *Violets and Other Tales*
- Though light skinned, she chose to remain Black and became a champion of Black Rights and Women’s Rights and an interpreter of the Harlem Renaissance
- She wrote numerous articles including “The Colored United States”
- Her diary, *Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, offers a telling view of the treatment of women during the early part of 20th Century America

Program 3: 1925 - 1937

Program three depicts the brilliant new voices of African American literature of the Harlem Renaissance against the backdrop of the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression.

The unique literary style of Countee Cullen and his deep insights into the issue of racial discrimination are shown in Chapter one.

Chapter two discusses how Jessie Redmon Fauset, known as the ‘Midwife of the Harlem Renaissance,’ not only penned groundbreaking novels about interracial characters, but encouraged young Black writers to find their voices and be heard.

Chapter three depicts the life and writings of Sterling A. Brown who, with the waning of the Harlem Renaissance, returned Black literature to its rural southern roots.

How Arna Bontemps created the new genre, the Black Historical Fiction novel, is discussed in chapter four.

Chapter five examines the life and writings of Black feminist author Nora Zeale Hurston.

Chapter 1: 1925 - Countee Cullen Pens ‘Heritage’

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- A poet of the Harlem, Countee Cullen wrote about the terrible plight of the Black man in America
- He wrote in the sonnet form with the polished lyricism of the great 19th Century English Romantic poets
- A brief biography of Cullen
- In 1925 he published his first and most popular collection of poems, *Color*
- His poem ‘Heritage’ is an anthem to the Harlem Renaissance
- Though his most famous poems were about race, Cullen considered himself to be a “raceless” poet, publishing many poems with universal themes and ideas

Chapter 2: 1928 - Jessie Redmon Fauset Publishes *Plum Bun*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Jessie Redmon Fauset is now known as the ‘midwife’ of the Harlem Renaissance
 - She opened the door for a number of different writers to come to the literary forefront
 - She was the first person to publish Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes’ work
- While nurturing the artistic genius of these writers, she wrote her own novels, including the 1924 *There is Confusion*
 - The novel was written in response to a racist novel by T.S. Stribling, called *Birthright*
 - In 1929 Fauset wrote her masterpiece, *Plum Bun*
 - The book revisits characters who can pass as white and who, for whatever reason, can’t have access to something that’s dear to their heart
 - It is an odyssey into understanding the human condition and how, particularly in America, we allow race to stand in for what identity truly is

Chapter 3: 1932 - Sterling Brown, Master of Dialect

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Born on the Howard University campus in 1901, Sterling A. Brown was literally a child of Black Academia and literature
- He spent his post-college years fascinated with the everyday lives of rural Blacks, as well as the lyrical rhythms of Black music such as the Blues, Jazz and work songs

- These would be the inspirations for, and subjects of, his imaginative poetry
- At the age of 31, he published his first and only collection of poems, *Southern Road*
 - He showed that dialect could express everything Black people felt or thought
 - All the emotions, all the tones, all the moods could be captured in this racy, genuine language
- His signature poem from the *Southern Road* collection will forever be ‘Strong Men’
 - This poem is a history of Black people. Brown’s poetry shows the incredible strength and incredible pride he has in his people

Chapter 4: 1936 - Arna Bontemps, *Black Thunder*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- In the 21st Century, African American literature is a significant part of great American literature
- The acceptance of Black literature by mainstream American culture did not come easily
- It required the tireless work of Arna Bontemps who was a chronicler, promoter and author of Black literature
- Bontemps is primarily known for his poetry and his historical novel *Black Thunder: Gabriel’s Revolt: Virginia 1800*
 - In this brilliant masterpiece, Bontemps combines history with his rich imagination to make a historical fiction novel told from the Black perspective
 - In the novel, Bontemps reconstructs a famous 19th Century slave rebellion from the viewpoint of the slave community living on the plantation
- Bontemps was always examining how African Americans, despite racial oppression, live dignified lives
- One of his most notable poems is called “A Black Man Talks of Reaping”

Chapter 5: 1937 - Zora Neale Hurston Completes *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- A brief biography of Zora Neale Hurston’s life
- Hurston went to Barnard where she worked with the great father of cultural anthropology, Franz Boas
- She was a proto-feminist writer and a matriarch within the Black tradition and a southern writer
- During her time in New York, Hurston participated in the Harlem Renaissance, and her talents were nurtured by its architect, Alain Locke
- She, alongside Langston Hughes and Wallace Thurman, worked for the literary magazine *Fire!!*
- Eventually moved back to the south to throw herself into African American folklore
- Out of this folklore came her brilliant non-fiction book *Mules and Men*, which was published in 1935
- She also captured the beauty and power of Black dialect in her writing
- No other novel has dealt more with the Black oral tradition than her 1937 seminal work, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
 - The book was criticized by Blacks for showing them in a bad light

- But the novel also captured the kinds of folk speech and folk stories that she collected in her work as an anthropologist
- Despite her notoriety, Hurston would never in her lifetime receive recognition for her contributions to Black Literature
- After her death, famed author Alice Walker revived interest in Hurston's work

Program 4: 1938 – 1953

Program four looks at how Black authors challenged the racial inequalities of mainstream America in the twenty years before the Civil Rights movement of the fifties and sixties.

Chapter one looks at the life and works of Richard Wright, author and civil rights activist.

The life and writings of Gwendolyn Brooks, the first Black author to win a Pulitzer, are described in Chapter two.

Chapter three examines the literary and Black consciousness masterpiece of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

The influence and importance of James Baldwin is depicted in chapter four.

Chapter 1: Richard Wright, Father of Black Protest Fiction

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Richard Wright's lasting legacy as an African American writer is that he is known as the father of protest literature
- With this new genre in literature, Richard Wright deflated the myth of the subservient and complacent Black man
- Wright accomplished this daring feat with his 1940 *Native Son*
 - A masterpiece of Black protest fiction, it would change America's racial landscape
- This form - Black protest fiction – became important, popular and profoundly influential not only in literature but in sociology
- Richard Wright was raised in the heart of Jim Crow laws and black oppression by Southern whites
- In 1945 he published his telling autobiography, *Black Boy*
 - The book details his struggles with racism, religion and finding himself as a writer
- He is considered a forerunner of the Black Arts Movement, the artistic expression of the Black Power movement

Chapter 2: 1950 - Gwendolyn Brooks, the First Black Pulitzer Prize Recipient

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Poet Gwendolyn Brooks' themes transcended race
- They were human themes that sang to the souls of American women
- A brief biography of Brooks
- In 1950, she became the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize for her book of

poems, *Annie Allen*

- In the sonnet 'The Rites for Cousin Vit', the character Annie Allen denies death and affirms life
- However, it is in Brooks' novel, *Maud Martha*, that her main character discovers a fundamental truth
 - How she could be an ordinary Black woman and be beautiful as well
 - Maud Martha wants everything that women wanted in the middle of the 20th Century; a home, a husband, a family
 - She wants this even though she feels that in many ways she's not going to be fortunate enough to get this because she sees herself as a very plain Black woman
- Gwendolyn Brooks was among the first to write on the idea of the dark skinned Black woman
- Brooks died in 2000, having inspired three Generations of Black women writers
- Many also say that this greatest of female writers inspired the idea that Black is beautiful

Chapter 3: 1953 - Ralph Ellison Wins National Book Award

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Ralph Ellison excelled as a critic and scholar of African American Literature
- Ellison published one novel in his lifetime, his 1952 masterpiece, *Invisible Man*
 - It would make Ralph Ellison the first Black author to win America's prestigious National Book Award
 - Told through the perspective of an anonymous American Black man, Ellison explored northern and southern forms of racism and their chilling effects on its protagonist
 - Ellison's invisible Black man is cut off and marginalized by mainstream America
 - Not only do people refuse to *see* him, but he can find no worth or purpose in his African American community, or American society as a whole
- A brief biography of Ellison
- Ellison's 1964 collection of essays about Black culture in America, *Shadow and Act*, is among the 20th Century's best non-fiction books

Chapter 4: 1953 - James Baldwin Writes *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- James Baldwin was a playwright, poet, novelist, essayist, activist and orator
- He wrote from multiple perspectives
- He wrote and spoke not only of the Black experience but the view of Whites from the Black perspective
- He is intellectual, approachable, and also interested in speaking to America
- Baldwin is noted for redirecting the African American novel toward a different kind of fiction and style
- Baldwin is seen as the literary figure most prominent in the Civil Rights movement
- A brief biography of Baldwin
- Being both Black and homosexual, Baldwin was disgusted by the treatment of these groups by mainstream America

- As a result, at the age of 24, he decided to leave the U.S. and move to Paris
- Free from American racism, he was able to craft his unique perspective on race and discrimination
- In 1953 he published his groundbreaking novel, his semi-autobiographical masterpiece, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*
 - It is the story of a young man coming of age and experiencing puberty
 - His attempt to understand himself sexually is symbolic of a larger attempt to understand his relationship to his family, his church and his community
- In 1957, Baldwin returned to the States where he became a major player in the Civil Rights Movement
 - In 1963 he published his critical essay *The Fire Next Time*
- Baldwin's writings and insights have earned him a place as one of the greatest thinkers in the second half of 20th Century America

Program 5: 1954 – 1967

Program five looks at the great African American playwrights as well as other Black authors during the second great Black literary movement – the Black Arts Movement – against the backdrop of growing racial tension in 1960s America.

Chapter one looks at Chester Himes who infused Black literary themes into the crime fiction genre to create Black crime fiction.

Chapter two looks at Lorraine Hansberry and her compelling drama, *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Malcolm X and his transformational memoir, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, are discussed in Chapter three.

Chapter four examines the literary expression of Black power through the patriarch of the Black Arts Movement, Amiri Baraka.

The life and poetry of Nikki Giovanni are shown in chapter five.

Chapter 1: 1957 - Chester Himes, First Black Crime Fiction Writer

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- In post WWII America, Chester Himes combined the hardboiled detective with Black protest fiction to create the savvy, Black, resourceful detective
- A brief biography of Himes
- In 1945 he finished his first novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, a piece of protest fiction set in the shipyards of Himes' newly adopted Los Angeles
- Fed up with the racial prejudice in America, Himes, like many Black writers of the time, left the country and moved to Paris
 - Here, Himes began his hugely popular *Harlem Detective* novels with Coffin Ed Johnson and Gravedigger Jones
- Himes opened the door to allow Black authors to work in many genres

Chapter 2: 1959 - Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* is Produced

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Nothing captured the angst and dilemma facing Black Americans, and the American Black male in particular, better than Lorraine Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun*
- Her play achieved a number of firsts
- It was the first play written by a Black woman to be produced on Broadway
 - It won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award
 - Hansberry was the youngest writer and the first Black to receive this award
 - A brief biography of Hansberry
 - Lorraine Hansberry is a signature figure in African American literature especially with women playwrights
- *A Raisin in the Sun* presents the first representation of a fully fleshed out African American character
- Historically, Hansberry's play told an empirical truth
 - America's Black community, from Ph.D. to welfare recipient, is bound together by the same racial prejudices and injustices
- What the play so prophetically showed was the need for, as Black author James Baldwin put it, "a profound articulation of the Black tradition"

Chapter 3: 1965 – *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Malcolm X, standing on the shoulders of great Black activists like Martin Delany and Marcus Garvey, unified America's Black Power Movement in the turbulent '60s
- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* revitalized the world of African American autobiography
- It also embodied the essence of Black Power and the Black Arts movements of the late 60's
- The book used Malcolm X's own transformational story as an allegory for the larger struggle for Blacks
- Alex Haley helped to tell Malcolm X's story, in what would become *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Chapter 4: 1965 - Amiri Baraka, Father of the Black Arts Movement

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- The Black Arts Movement rose out of the turmoil of the 1960s and the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements
- The father of this movement was Amiri Baraka, who started it when he founded the Black Repertory Arts Theatre in Harlem
- The Black Arts Movement focused on allowing Black people to express their values, concerns and issues
- A brief biography of Baraka
- When we think about the poets of the Black Arts Movement, it is important to think of them for their morality
- Baraka's provocative style has made him one of the most controversial poets of the

20th and 21st Centuries

- The contributions of his Black Arts Movement are unparalleled
 - The establishment of African American Studies programs in most American Universities
 - Inspiration for other oppressed American minorities such as Latinos, Native Americans and gays and lesbians to stand up and fight for their rights
 - Influencing future Black literary greats like Toni Morrison, August Wilson and Alice Walker

Chapter 5: 1967 - Nikki Giovanni, “Princess of Black Poetry”

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Nikki Giovanni is an amazing poet
- She can take history or a newspaper article and bring wisdom and humor to that history so that a person is mesmerized by her talks
- She knows how to use language in the most ironic and simplest way
- A brief biography of Giovanni
- She self published her first volume of poetry in 1967, *Black Feeling, Black Talk*
- Within the next three years she would publish *Black Judgment* and *Re: Creation*
- Giovanni’s hard hitting style changed later in life, exemplified in the 1997 collection, *Love Poems*
- In 2009 she published *Bicycles: Love Poems*, where she compares the riding of a bicycle to the balance and trust needed in a loving relationship
- Every poem has a deep respect for humanity and her poetry questions how we are sometimes less than what we should be as human beings

Program 6: 1968 – 1982

In Program six, the Black Arts Movement is highlighted through the wide array of genres and styles that emerged from Black feminist poets and playwrights to Alex Haley’s sensational historical novel, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*

Chapter one examines the work of the great Black poet, Maya Angelou.

Toni Cade Bambara’s skillful look at racial issues of the period is examined in Chapter two.

Chapters three and four discuss how Black authors Alice Childress and Ed Bullins dramatized America’s cultural and economic divide between Blacks and Whites.

Chapter five looks at Alex Haley and his groundbreaking novel, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*

Chapter six shows how feminist Gloria Naylor introduced the Black female perspective into modern African-American literature.

Chapter 1: 1969 - Maya Angelou Writes Her Autobiography

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Maya Angelou put her life's story in seven groundbreaking autobiographies, starting with the first and most renowned in 1969, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
- She has lived an extraordinary life at the far extremes of the American experience
- Working with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. led her to write her own autobiography
 - She told the story of a young Black American girl that had never been told, allowing many writers to follow in her literary footsteps
 - Maya Angelou's series of autobiographies changed the possibilities for African Americans
 - The narratives opened a framework to talk about humanity along and across different lines
- Her 1971 volume of poetry, *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diie*, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize
- Maya Angelou has received more than 50 honorary degrees and has the distinguished title of Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University

Chapter 2: 1972 - Toni Cade Bambara Publishes *Gorilla, My Love*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Toni Cade Bambara was a short story writer, novelist and filmmaker
- She was part of the Black Arts Movement
- In 1972 she published a collection of short stories titled *Gorilla, My Love*
 - In these stories Bambara writes about the blue collar Black community, often told through the eyes of young Black girls
- In 1980 she wrote her first novel and most popular work, *The Salt Eaters*
 - The novel, written in an experimental style, tells of a healer who has come to cure a hospitalized suicide survivor

Chapter 3: 1973 - Alice Childress, *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Alice Childress wrote plays and novels that fought against Black stereotypes and false characterizations
- She talks about human frailty in ways that really talk about the ability of the human spirit to survive and recreate itself despite issues related to race in this country
- Childress captures for us through her space and time in the 1970s what the landscape was like for people in this country, particularly the inner city
- A brief biography of Childress
- In 1949, she wrote her brilliant one act play *Florence*
 - The play mirrors Childress' own battles with becoming a Black actress in a White-dominated world
- Her play, *Trouble in Mind*, dealt with the power struggles of an integrated theater company to stage a Broadway play for its commercially driven White producers
- In the early '70s Childress switched to novels and wrote her best known book *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich*

- It is about a 13 year old who becomes addicted to heroin and the family struggles to reclaim his life in that process

Chapter 4: 1975 - Ed Bullins Premieres *The Taking of Miss Janie*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Ed Bullins was an unapologetic, controversial and poignant playwright, who became a key player in the Black Arts Movement
- He used his skills as a playwright to educate Black audiences about the power of their racial trials and tribulations
- He wrote over fifty plays, including *Goin' a Buffalo* and *In the Wine Time*, which challenged White superiority and promoted Black pride
- However, his most acclaimed and controversial play would be 1975's *The Taking of Miss Janie*
 - The play is about a naïve White girl who wants to be accepted by the Black community and is raped by a fellow Black student
 - *The Taking of Miss Janie* would win Bullins an Obie and a New York Drama Critics Circle Award
 - About the play Bullins said, "I don't write to please the audience and reassure everyone that we agree ... just so it makes them examine themselves"
- In 1995, Bullins was appointed a distinguished artist in residence at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts

Chapter 5: 1976 - Alex Haley Groundbreaking *Roots*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Alex Haley wrote the book *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, which also became a prominent TV mini-series
 - The book chronicles the Black American experience from slavery all the way to freedom
 - It is based on his own family
- A brief biography of Haley
- Haley's distinguished literary career took off when he co-authored *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, in 1965
- His second historical novel, *Alex Haley's Queen*, was published in 1978

Chapter 6: 1982 - Gloria Naylor Celebrates the Black Woman

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- No Black woman since Gwendolyn Brooks has written more about Black female identity than Gloria Naylor
- She encouraged African American women to accept and be proud of themselves and their place in the Black community
- In 1982, she published her first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*
 - The book deals with heterosexual and lesbian women trying to find their own identity and community and the importance of sisterhood and relationships
- Naylor has published five more novels: *Linden Hills*, *Mama Day*, *Bailey's Café*, *The Men of Brewster Place* and *1996*

Program 7: 1982 – 1993

Program seven examines the new voices of talented young Black authors, poets and playwrights of the Post Black Arts Movement in what has been called the Golden Age of African American literature.

Chapter one examines Alice Walker’s award-winning novel of the Jim Crow era in the south, *The Color Purple*.

The strong poetry of Lucille Clifton is depicted in Chapter two.

Chapter three discusses the life and plays of August Wilson, the chronicler of 20th Century Black America.

Chapter four looks at the deeply philosophical poetry of Yusef Komunyakaa, whose lyrical work transcends race.

Chapter five talks about crime fiction writer, Walter Mosley, and his timeless detective Easy Rawlins.

The universal love story of E. Lynn Harris is shown in Chapter six.

Chapter seven describes the life and work of Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison.

Chapter 1: 1982 - Alice Walker Writes *The Color Purple*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Alice Walker is a feminist and civil rights activist, which would lead to her lasting contribution to African American Literature
- She helped bridge the gap between the Black Freedom Movement and the Feminist Movement by espousing this womanist perspective
- In 1982, she finished her masterpiece, *The Color Purple*
 - The book is structured around a series of letters to God by Celie who speaks of the sexual abuse, violence and acts of degradation against her
 - It is a novel about female empowerment and female sexuality
 - This groundbreaking novel earned Walker a National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize
- In 2013 Alice Walker released her short story collection *The Cushion in the Road* and a book of poems, *The World Will Follow Joy Turning Madness into Flowers*

Chapter 2: 1987 - Lucille Clifton’s Poetry Celebrates the Female Body

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Lucille Clifton’s poetry honors African American culture and heritage
- Her poetry also celebrates the beauty and power of the female body
- She talks about women’s issues in a frank and open manner

Chapter 3: 1987 - August Wilson Wins Pulitzer for *Fences*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- American August Wilson depicted the comic and tragic aspects of the Black experience in 20th Century America in a cycle of ten plays
 - These plays brought a new interpretation of Black history to the country
- He was celebrated as the most accomplished Black playwright in this nation's history
- He rejected both the Harlem Renaissance's glorification of Black life and the outraged anger of Black writers
 - Wilson said, "I think my plays offer them a different way to look at Black Americans "
- A brief bio of Wilson and influences on his writing
- In 1968 Wilson co-founded the Black Horizon Theater in the Hill District of Pittsburgh and began to write plays about Black life
 - The result was August Wilson's Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning 'Pittsburgh Cycle'
 - All 10 plays, each set in a different decade beginning with 1900, give a unique snapshot of the comedy and adversity of Black life in 20th Century America

Chapter 4: 1988 - Yusef Komunyakaa Pens 'Facing It'

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Yusef Komunyakaa is an award winning poet, who was also a journalist during the Vietnam War
- He uses that experience to give grist to his poetry
- He is a master of poetic imagery and digs deeper into Black racial issues to uncover universal truths
- In 1988, he published *Dien Cai Dau*, Vietnamese for "crazy in the head"
 - This collection contained his signature poem, 'Facing It'
- In 1994, Yusef Komunyakaa's profound poetry collection, *Neon Vernacular: New and Selected Poems*, once again found the underlying beauty in everyday life
 - It won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry
- He is New York University's Distinguished Senior Poet

Chapter 5: 1990 - Walter Mosley Introduces Easy Rawlins

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Walter Mosley has written in many genres and styles, including playwriting, political non-fiction and sci-fi
- His most popular books are crime and mystery novels
- A brief biography of Mosley
- Mosley's tour de force came with his first published book, the 1990 *Devil in a Blue Dress*
- The novel introduces one of the most popular characters in American detective fiction, Easy Rawlins
- The book focuses on a working class Black man - a Black everyman
- The Easy Rawlins book series spans over ten novels

Chapter 6: 1993 - Toni Morrison Wins the Nobel Prize in Literature

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Toni Morrison’s intellectual prowess and insightful characters have ushered in a new era in Black letters
- She is the first African American Nobel Prize winner in literature
- Her novels appeal to a wide audience
- A brief biography of Morrison
- Her many innovative novels get to the heart of the Black experience in America
- Published in 1977, *Song of Solomon* remains one of her most cherished novels
 - It follows the character of Milkman Dead who travels to understand where his family comes from
- In 1987 she introduced her most critically acclaimed novel, *Beloved*
 - The novel won her a Pulitzer Prize
 - The book tells of a Black woman in the 1850s, who, born into slavery kills her own daughter rather than let her live a life as a slave

Program 8: 1993 to Present

Program eight examines the trailblazers of the Black New Wave of literature. These are young men and women finding fresh ways to communicate the Black experience in America.

Chapter one looks at Ernest J. Gaines who in his greatest work, *A Lesson Before Dying*, dealt with the contradiction between the beauty of the rural south and its violence toward Blacks.

Chapters two and three discuss the vivid poetry of Rita Dove and Cornelius Eady.

The plays of Suzan-Lori Parks are looked at in chapter four.

Chapter five discusses the striking poetry of Natasha Tretheway, as well as the work of Olympia Vernon, Ayana Mathis, Tayari Jones and Tony Medina.

Chapter 1: 1993 - Ernest J. Gaines Completes *A Lesson Before Dying*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Earnest J. Gaines has spent his life steeped in the rich cultural history of the Black rural South
- He embraced the dark violent history of Blacks and slavery and the beautiful rural Louisiana landscape
- This love of Black History and the South would be the main themes in his literary works
- Nowhere does he do this better than in his 1993 masterpiece, *A Lesson Before Dying*
 - Set in rural Louisiana in the 1940s, the story focuses on a southern Black schoolteacher, Grant Wiggins
 - Grant is forced by the community around him to educate a local Black man,

- Jefferson, before he is executed
 - Ernest J Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying* won the National Book Critics' Circle Award
- Two of his other popular novels, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman* and *A Gathering of Old Men*, were made into popular movies

Chapter 2: 1993 - Rita Dove is Appointed Poet Laureate of The United States

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Rita Dove is the quintessential post Black Arts Movement poet
- She writes on a variety of topics, from protesting the injustice in society, to ballroom dancing, to motherhood
- A brief biography of Dove
- In 1983, her remarkable poem 'Parsley' was included in her volume, *Museum*
 - The essence of this story is that there's a general who kills thousands because they cannot pronounce the Spanish word for parsley
- In 1986, Dove would publish her most beloved collection of Poems, *Thomas and Beulah*, based on the lives and history surrounding her maternal grandparents
- She became the second African American to receive the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry
- From 1993 to 1995 she was honored to be the first to serve under the official title of United States Poet Laureate
- In 2004, she finished her eighth collection of poems called *American Smooth*

Chapter 3: 2001 - Cornelius Eady Writes *Brutal Imagination*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Contemporary African American literature owes a lot to the accomplishments of poet Cornelius Eady
- His combination of African American music and poignant political commentary is unparalleled
- His poetry draws upon the blues
- He also is mindful of history and to the ways that the Black image has been exploited and manipulated for different ends
- *Brutal Imagination*, published in 2001, is his most popular collection of poems
 - It deals with the story of Susan Smith, a woman who essentially killed her own children and tried to blame it on a young Black man
 - Eady gives voice to this phantom Black male
 - He also creates this really striking and disturbing view into the ways that racial stereotype allows us to be blinded to obvious facts
- Eady has published eight volumes of striking, insightful Poetry including *Victims of the Last Dance Craze*, *The Gathering of My Name* and *Hardheaded Weather*
- In 1996, Eady and fellow poet Toi Derricotte founded the Cave Canem Foundation, a national organization for African American poetry and poets

Chapter 4: 2002 - Suzan-Lori Parks Wins Pulitzer for *Topdog/Underdog*

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Suzan-Lori Parks makes readers look at the big events, the big movements as well as

the subtle moments in life

- A Pulitzer Prize winning Black playwright, Suzan-Lori Parks has ushered in a new age for African American literature
- She was mentored by Black author and Civil Rights activist James Baldwin
- She produced a string of hit plays, including *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* and *Topdog/Underdog*
- She became the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama
- In *Topdog/Underdog* she asks viewers to dismantle Abraham Lincoln and the story surrounding his freeing the slaves
- After the success of *Topdog/Underdog*, Parks took on her most ambitious work, writing a short play every day for a year
 - The result was *365 Plays/365 Days*, which was produced by 700 theaters around the world, in venues ranging from street corners to opera houses
 - It is the largest grassroots collaboration in theater history

Chapter 5: 2012 - Natasha Trethewey And the New Wave

Student Goals – In this *Great African American Authors* chapter, students will learn:

- Natasha Trethewey was appointed United States Poet Laureate in 2012
- She brings to African American poetry, her own unique voice and experience
- Trethewey is a consummate American poet immersing from a southern background
- Choosing her as U.S. Poet Laureate shifts the center of cultural gravity to the Gulf Coast, acknowledging the richness of its artistic heritage
- Moving on from the Post Black Arts Movement she has blazed a trail for the next wave of great Black authors, including:
 - Olympia Vernon has published three coming of age novels *Eden*, *Logic* and *A Killing In This Town*
 - In 2012, Ayana Mathis' published her debut novel, *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie*
 - Tayari Jones' novels include, *Leaving Atlanta*, *The Untelling* and *Silver Sparrow*
 - Poet Tony Medina brilliantly keeps the strong African American poetic tradition alive with deeply satirical and shocking collection of poems, *An Onion of Wars*
- Contemporary African American literature is breaking new ground from a new look at older genres to magical realism and attempting a kind of racelessness
- The Black literary tradition will continue to be reinvented and reinvigorated as new authors emerge to take on the challenge of being Black and American