

Educational Guide  
for ‘Eavesdropping  
on Souls: A Journey  
into Haitian Arts’

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Exploring Haitian Arts with students from any country the teacher or professor can teach the content within the context of policies and programs of their own curriculum whether it is Social Studies, Visual Arts or Media Literacy. Weaving arts and the standard curriculum together will create a richer experience for students. In addition, Visual Arts is a discipline which offers potent tools in an integrated curriculum.

Through studying works of art from various cultures, students deepen their appreciation of diverse perspectives and develop the ability to approach others with openness and flexibility. Seeing the works of art produced by their classmates also helps them learn about, accept, and respect the identity of others and the differences among people. The openness that is fostered by study of the arts helps students to explore and appreciate the culture of diverse peoples everywhere. Students learn that people use the arts to record, celebrate, and pass on to future generations their personal and collective stories and the values and traditions that make us unique. (Ref: The Ontario curriculum, grades 11, 12, pp.-4.)

Objectives of every school program, has to do with a student's success. One of the outcomes of success is: 'expanding one's horizons,' learning from others and from others' creation and culture; consequently, we become better at what we do, benefit from other's experience and at the same time learn a lot about ourselves.

Whether one is a cultural animator, a senior high school teacher or a college professor, s / he can look toward doing one of the following things:

- Promoting the roles of imagination and creativity in classrooms and / or the community context
- Developing an awareness of aesthetics
- Promoting an appreciation of the intrinsic value of creating art and the joy and fulfillment it can provide
- Presenting a variety of perspectives when discussing visual arts
- Modeling the integration of various point of view
- Having fun while learning

This educational guide accompanies the documentary: ‘Eavesdropping on Souls: A Journey into Haitian Arts.’ Its purpose is to help students explore, not only Haitian arts, but also to put these artistic expressions into larger contexts. It is advisable to educators initiating study of this documentary to expand according to their field of teaching.

Educators can use this opportunity to expand into cultures or history according to what they teach, also they can use other cultural contexts to help students find basic criteria for comparison.

## CONTEXTUALIZATION AND COMPARISON

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When we contextualize, we place things and / or people in time and space. Contextualizing betters the understanding of what we are about to observe, to explore and to study.

When we compare, we identify similarities and differences. We compare with what we already knew and the animator / teacher / professor can help by going further by providing situations and / or opportunities; so by comparing, we can go further in our knowledge acquisition.

Communicate our understanding orally, in writing, photography and any other way of our choosing; reflecting on what we learned; participating in intellectual

discussion are the desirable forms of acquiring success for students as well as the animator / teacher/ professor.

# CHAPTER II

## HAITI IN CONTEXT



Haiti is situated in the Caribbean basin and located between the longitude 72 25' west and latitude 19 00' North.

To the East is the Dominican Republic which is between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. From its geographical location, Haiti is considered a Caribbean country and is part of North America.

It is a small country of 27,560 square kilometers of land and 190 square kilometers of water.

Haiti is so close to the Florida coast that some Haitians built their own little boats in an attempt to get to the United States to escape political and economic hardship. Barack Obama once stated: 'They are in our back yard.'

Haiti is very mountainous, vulnerable to hurricanes, flooding and other climate-related disasters. In 2008, climatic disasters causing losses to the agricultural sector with damages worth \$US 200 million.

In 2014, Haiti reported a population of 10, 461, 409 persons. The rural population in Haiti is estimated at 4, 452,794 and, within that number the rural poor is estimated at 3, 335,143. The capital city, Port-au-Prince counts 1,234,742 in 2014.

## VERY BRIEF HISTORY<sup>1</sup>

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During the colonial era, Saint-Domingue had once again become Haïti and was inhabited by three groups of individuals, each with its own distinct status: Whites, Freedmen and Slaves.

The Whites were people who had emigrated from Europe with the hope of quickly becoming rich. Among them were rascals who had fled from justice, reformed or discharged officers and finally, Whites born on the island were called « créole whites ». This last group had priority over everything. It held all powers, including the power to kill.

The Freedmen included all Mulattoes, these were Blacks rewarded by white masters and some Black women who served as cleaning ladies. Freedmen were frowned upon by Whites and had no civil, political or social rights. Lastly, the Blacks were at the bottom of the social and political ladders. They formed the majority of the island's population. The first Blacks arrived in the colony in 1503.

Blacks were loaded on large ships called « négriers » and brought over from Africa to make up for the labor (1) shortage caused by the disappearance of Indians decimated by European diseases and hard working conditions in the mines. These unfortunate individuals were packed as cattle and died in large numbers during the voyage. Those who made it alive to the island quickly understood the fate that awaited them. They experienced horrible suffering. They were slaves as clearly defined by Dantès Bellegarde : (It is a thing subject to the

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<sup>1</sup> (Written originally by Rouvio St-Jean, a Haitian writer living in Montreal, translated from the French by Haitian translator Marlye Monfiston, living in Toronto.)

Master's whim, a machine to be exploited to the maximum.) Malnourished and mistreated they longed for relief in death, believing that on that splendid day their soul would go back to Africa to be amongst their people.

Slaves were the main reason of the economic growth of the colony. Their presence transformed the island at all levels. Commerce, farming, everything worked extremely well. At one point in time, the foreign trade of the island exceeded 240 million francs, more than that of the United States. Thus, the island was nicknamed the "Pearl of the Antilles."

Slaves suffered for a long time but they waited for a favorable (2) moment to organize a revolt. On the night of April 22 to 23, 1791, Boukman gave the watchword leading to the uprising at the now famous Bois Caïman ceremony but he perished in the battle. At his death, rebels vowed to continue their struggle for freedom. Nothing was going to stop them. This rebellion started in the North and spread to the West and the South. France sent a Commission to the island to stop what it considered a disturbance and to restore peace. Sonthonax, the most active member of the Commission one day wrote: "The lands of Saint-Domingue should belong to the Blacks. They acquired them with sweat and toil." On August 29, 1794, Sonthonax abolished slavery.

However, in 1802 Napoléon Bonaparte considered it necessary to re-establish slavery. Toussaint Louverture who exercised a prominent role in the colony was a major hurdle to this step backwards. He fiercely opposed it. Under the pretense of soliciting Toussaint's advice to re-establish peace on the island, General Brunet invited him to a meeting; it was a trap. Toussaint was arrested and deported to France. As he left, he said: "In overthrowing me, you have done no more than cut down the trunk of the tree of Black liberty in Saint-Domingue. It will spring back from the roots for they are numerous and deep." Toussaint died on April 7, 1803 at Fort de Joux in France. The indigenous army selected Dessalines as its leader to conduct operations and continue the fight. And, in November 1803, the bloody Vertières battle sealed the victory of Dessalines' troops. The Rochambeau army was shredded to pieces. On January 1, 1804, Haïti proclaimed its independence in

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Gonaïves before a large crowd repeating with one voice: “Live free or die.” However, Thomas Jefferson like the French, refused to recognize this independence.

Later, the victorious army led by Dessalines and his generals travelled to several South American countries to help them win their independence by supplying weapons, ammunition, advice and men. The late President Hugo Chavez never missed an opportunity to remind people of Venezuela the contribution of this army to the independence of their country.

(1) labor (USA), labour (Canada)

(2) favorable (USA), favourable (Canada)

## **Institutionalized cruelty in contemporary Haiti.**

From 1957 to 1986 under the reign of François Duvalier proclaimed himself president for life and established a cruel dictatorship in the country. Later his son Jean-Claude Duvalier became president at the age of 19. During this time Haitians lived in a kind of hell characterized by cruelty and brutality of a regime whose objectives were to maintain power, govern by fear, and kill the opposition. People were being arrested and thrown in jail without knowing why. For example, a person who did not like you could accuse you of badmouthing the government and have you sent to jail. Other things could happen that would even put your life in jeopardy. Often entire families disappeared altogether.

Haitians fled the country by whatever means possible. It was at that time that, professionals, people who are well read and who can understand what was going on, were considered enemies of the regime. It was the beginning of the 1960's; Haitians took the opportunities to travel to several African countries which had just become politically independent. Haitians went also to other islands like the Bahamas the United States, Canada and some European countries.

Duvalier executed opponents or those considered traitors and sometimes these killings were broadcast live in radio to serve as example to would-be traitors who would then be silent. That is the way most professionals left and the country became poorer for it.

More than ten years ago, another kind of cruelty from Haiti was the kidnapping of people who have relatives living outside Haiti. Now, these criminals are trying to disrobe and ruin those who are working hard outside Haiti to help their parents in Haiti. Several Haitians will tell you tales of borrowing at the banks in Canada and the US to send money to free parents who have been kidnapped. These Haitians spend ten to fifteen years paying kidnapping debt, while continuing to support parents in Haiti. Those are not foreign people, they are not colonizers, these are Haitians creating crimes against other Haitians. There is no more comment to be made about that practice.

## **Haitians outside Haiti.**

One of the main purposes for most Haitians who left Haiti, particularly the first generation out of Haiti, was to help parents or close relatives who were left behind and who could not make a reasonable living staying there. Of course, everybody could not leave. When you talk to someone living in Haiti, too many have the primary objective of leaving Haiti. It was a time under the Duvalier's regime when people were thinking only of leaving and the destination was irrelevant. Anywhere else was perceived to be better than where they are.

Remittances from Haitians outside Haiti.

According to a report by the World's bank, total remittances sent via formal channels equaled 1.6 billion (US) in 2012 alone, representing 21 percent of Haiti's gross domestic product (GDP). From this 1.6 billion, 1.1 billion are from the Haitians living in the US. The amount of remittances received by Haiti increased tenfold since the late 1980s.

The United States is perceived as the ideal country for most Haitians and in second place, Canada. In 2012, statistics reveal that around a million Haitians are living in United States. The estimate for Canada is approximately 77, 000 and another 70, 000 are living in France. In addition, there are approximately 100,000 Haitians studying at American Universities (2012).

### **Haiti today:**

Haiti today is a very poor country. In 2014, it is listed 163 out of 188 countries from richest to poorest (Norway 1, USA 8, and Canada 9). According to the multi-dimensional poverty index (by the United Nations Development Program), approximately 5,104 million Haitians experience multi-dimensional poverty whose factors are health (nutrition, child poverty), education (years of schooling, children enrolled, intensity of poverty), and standard of living (cooking fuel, toilet, water, electricity, floor, assets). In 2012, more than 55% of the Haitian population was illiterate. Haiti imports 60% of the food it needs, including 80% of

## Poverty and Democracy

One living in North America for example, observed that young children in elementary schools have class presidents that they elected and are members of committees that they formed. These issues are discussed and voted on at their meetings. They have been learning the democratic process gradually since their youth. They also learned in games and in sports that losing is part of the game and they learned to accept it with grace when it happened to them.

Then you see powerful western countries, decided with spontaneity, to establish democracy in a place with over 50% illiteracy whose people are used to dictatorship and fear for a long time. They have to learn democracy while the election is being done. You heard that the United States is spending millions of dollars to conduct elections and expecting those people to act like the young kids, who are now adults and can discuss democracy, because they have been living it since they were children.

One does not know what to think.

the rice it consumes. Forty percent of the population has access to only 6% of income however, 2% of the rich has access to 26% of the national wealth. The poorest Haitian depend on self-employment and remittances from relatives living outside of Haiti.

## **The concept of poverty**

According to the World Bank, factors generally used to measure poverty are: low educational level, lack of infrastructure, poor access to credit and limited social capital. In addition, the existence of power structures in Haiti including rigid social classes maintain inequalities of access to knowledge, tools, land and water. Weak market infrastructure impedes sustainable agricultural development and subsequently income.

## CHAPTER III

# ARTS OF HAITI: EXPLORATION

Art is always integral to Haitian culture and lifestyle. Singing and dancing are ways Haitians use to cuddle their children, to share friendships, to express joy as well as sadness. In addition, the visual arts: Sculpture, Painting, Metal works, which can be seen everywhere in the country, from transportation engines to fashion, to salad bowls as well as custom jewelry and jewelry boxes. Each shows a great love for that kind of tapestry of arts.

In 1986, Marie José Nadal-Gardère and Gérard Bloncourt, two Haitians artists, published, by Nathan Editions in Paris, a bilingual coffee table book titled: ‘La Peinture Haïtienne’, ‘Haitian Arts.’ Although already thirty years old, this book stands as a testimony of the rich tapestry of colors and imagination married and living together and generating beauty where others would otherwise find hell. It’s a useful tool for anyone curious about creativity in Haiti. Since the publication of this book there have been hundreds written about Haitian arts.

Even in the times of colonization, talents were observed by some colonists who sent a few young men to study art in France.

From 1816 to 1818, there were a Royal Academy in Milot, in the North of the country and two English artists are known to have taught there. From 1816 to 1828, thirty Haitian artists, trained in France, were working in Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haitien. From 1850 to 1941, art was being taken seriously by the leaders of the time who made several commitments: The emperor Faustin Soulouque (1847-1859) founded the “Académie impériale de dessin et de peinture” (Imperial Academy of Drawing and Painting) in Port-au-Prince. After him, President Fabre Geffrard (1859-1867) established an Art Academy in Port-au-Prince.

Among several, two individuals can be considered instrumental in the development and promotion of Haitian arts. The first one is Dewitt Peters an American teacher. Dewitt Peters arrived in Haiti to teach English and was struck by the beauty of the arts all around him. He became a catalyst in gathering and



GEORGES NADER

appreciated. He created the “Centre d’Art” (Art Center). The second person is George Nader who, for fifty years took Haitian arts abroad, selling them and distributing them. By his actions, Haitian art became known and accessible around the world.

In 1945, the French writer, poet and Surrealism founder, André Breton went to Haiti, visited the ‘Centre d’Art’ and wrote about the great Haitian painter Hector Hyppolite in his book ‘Surréalisme et peinture’ in 1947. In 1948, André Breton returned to Haiti and bought 12 paintings of Hector Hyppolite. Hector Hyppolite died that year.

In 1947 Haitian painters exhibited at UNESCO, in Paris.

In October 1948, the Museum of Modern Arts of New York bought paintings of Philomé Obin and Jacques Enguerrand Gourgue; and in 1951, a painting of Wilson Rigaud titled: *Le meurtre dans la jungle*. (Death in the jungle). Jean-Paul Sartre, André Malraux visited Haiti and, Art Galleries in Europe organized Haitian exhibits.

Specialized magazines started writing about Haitian painting and Haitian artists began exhibiting outside Haiti. Haitian arts are being known and recognized internationally.

In 1949, *Time Magazine* published copy of the frescoes of the Episcopalian Cathedral. In 1951, William (Bill) Krauss wrote an important article on Haitian painting in *Holiday Magazine*.

Also, Haitian artists received bursaries to perfect their talents outside of Haiti. The Rockefeller Foundation offered a study bursary to three Haitians artists in 1948. And, in 1953 the first Guggenheim grant was given to the artist Antonio Joseph. Haitian art was represented at the Sao Paulo Biennial in Brazil and in 1966 Haiti was represented at the World Black Festival in Dakar, Senegal. During these times, Art galleries exploded in Haiti and several countries organized exhibits of Haitian paintings, such as Del Aiete, La Feluca in Rome, The Museum of Auxerre, The ORTF in France, Howard University in the United States and the Bellas Artes in Mexico.

Sometimes circumstances like immigration or forced immigration will play a major role in the ways one's life and talents evolve. By leaving one's country of birth, by adapting to other shores provides an opportunity for the arts to follow the curve. Some artists who leave Haiti do not define themselves as Haitian painters, they view their touch as different now, their tasted and smells are different and they are part of different discourses and different conversations. Some others, although born abroad but from Haitian parents, live all their lives in Haitian

neighborhoods, with Haitian values, Haitian taboos, Haitian weaknesses. Their talents reflect it.

Yet others do not want to be part of any gang, any elite or be classified in any category. They claim the same fate for their offspring, be it cultural, material or spiritual. Of course, they are Haitians! Then So What!

## HAITI AND THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

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**by Peggy Brooks-Bertram, Dr.P.H., Ph.D.**

*Eavesdropping on Souls* and the educational materials which support it, is of extraordinary educational value not only to the visual arts and to Haitian history but to US history as well. For example, one of the most important periods in African American history is the Harlem Renaissance with its emphasis on the arts of Black people including those of Haitian descent. In 1925, Alain Locke articulated the idea of the “New Negro” and admonished black artists in the United States to reclaim their legacy and embrace “the uniquely creative possibilities of their own natural racial heritage.” His theoretical statements resulted in the artistic movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. Aaron Douglas was an African American painter and graphic artist especially important in the Harlem Renaissance and played a leading role in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920’s. Later in his career he received a fellowship from the Julius Rosenwald Foundation in 1938, which funded his painting trip to Haiti and several other Caribbean islands. Equally important was William Edouard Scott who also received a Rosenwald Foundation grant to go to Haiti and paint. He produced 144 paintings and drawings in Haiti. Most of them were scenes of the everyday lives of Haitians and his exhibit was promoted by the Haitian government. He played a major role in invigorating Haitian art in the mid-twentieth century. In Haiti, Dr. Jean Price Mars initiated a similar project urging Haitian artists to look to their African heritage and to exalt the traditions that

came with the slave trade.” With the removal of the US Marines from Haiti in

### The Harlem Renaissance Movement.

The Harlem Renaissance is an important period where African-Americans arts and culture exploded, creating a new beginning where African Americans took inspiration from their own roots and culture and celebrate their heritage. It was a period of intellectual and spiritual growth. These changes and pride in themselves plant the seeds for the Civil Rights Movement.

“Blues is unique to the way African-American arrived, survived and thrived in the United States”. Ref: The Blues in American Culture, Thelonius Monk Institute of Jazz.

1934, there was fascination with the island and its mythologies which manifested itself in interesting ways in the US from staged musical portrayals and major off Broadway plays, e.g., *Black Mac Beth* (1926) and *Haiti* (1938). As for the visual arts, in 1937 there was created a multi-paneled series of paintings on the life and deeds of Toussaint L’Ouverture, the former slave turned military leader of the Haitian Revolution. This resulted in 41 paintings that stunned viewers at a 1939 Baltimore unveiling. These paintings “were remarkable not only for their high key colors and narrative strengths but for their clear and unapologetic allusions to black agency.” Even five years after the Harlem Renaissance had unofficially come to an end, there was still solid interest in works depicting Haiti and its history. Jacqueline Jean Baptiste with her film *Eaves dropping on Souls*, once again asks viewers all over as well as Haitian children and adults to take pride in the achievements of Haitian people and Haiti in general. Jean Baptiste takes the viewer to the historic island of Haiti with this outstanding work, and she powerfully introduces the world to current paintings from proud artists in Haiti as well as the Haitian/Cuban music that enriches the film. Both children and adults around the world will be able to make a connection

between the visual arts of this important time in history to the many successes of the Haitian people as expressed through these paintings.

Useful references:

**[Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance](#)**

*<https://books.google.com/books?isbn=0520212681>*

[Richard J. Powell](#), [David A. Bailey](#), [Hayward Gallery](#) - 1997

Cary D. Wintz. The Harlem Renaissance. A History and an Anthology.

Brandywine Press. 2003

<http://www.biography.com/people/aaron-douglas-39794>

## CHAPTER IV

# BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ARTS

Since the dawn of time, human beings used infinite ways to express themselves, to leave evidence of their presence and communicate this presence to others. One

way for us to know that there were human beings in some places at a certain time, is to examine what they left. Many times, it is by their arts that we recognize that they were there. Arts present themselves in many forms: Large stone structures, giant sculptures like the pyramids of Gizeh and of Mexico; Machupichu, graffiti in walls and some other art forms like painting, vase, masks and other sculptures which are embedded and form integral part of the culture of societies.

Every group of humans has its culture which is represented in part by what they built, either for



PEINTURE 1: ROBERT SYLVAIN: (ARTISTE, MIAMI, FL),



PEINTURE 2: ROBERT SYLVAIN, ARTISTE (MIAMI, FL)

their daily use, or to decorate their places and make beauty or express love and friendship. One cannot forget the Taj Mahal (in India) which was built by and for love.

Art is the expression of human imagination and skills, in the process of telling, showing important objects, ideas, feelings and emotions. Art is expressed by music, paintings, sculpture, literature, play, dance and other ways.

The oldest forms of art are visual.

Concepts in Visual Arts: a) Elements of Arts, b) Principles of Design

Elements of Arts

Line

Form

Shape

Colour (color),

Texture

are what artists use to produce art.

With these fundamental elements, artists associate **principles of design**:

Movement

Pattern

Unity

Proportion

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Balance

to convey their ideas or feelings.



PEINTURE 3: FRED THOMAS, ARTISTE (MIAMI, FL)



Peinture 4: FRED THOMAS, ARTISTE, (MIAMI, FL)



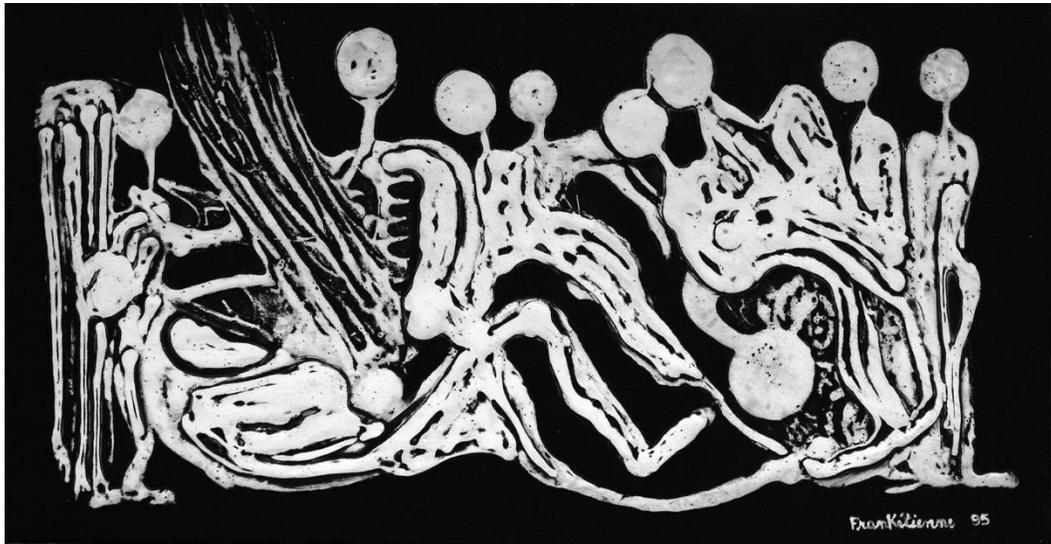
PEINTURE 5: ALPI, ARTISTE (MIAMI, FL)



PEINTURE 6: CAP HAÏTIEN (HAÏTI), (2013)



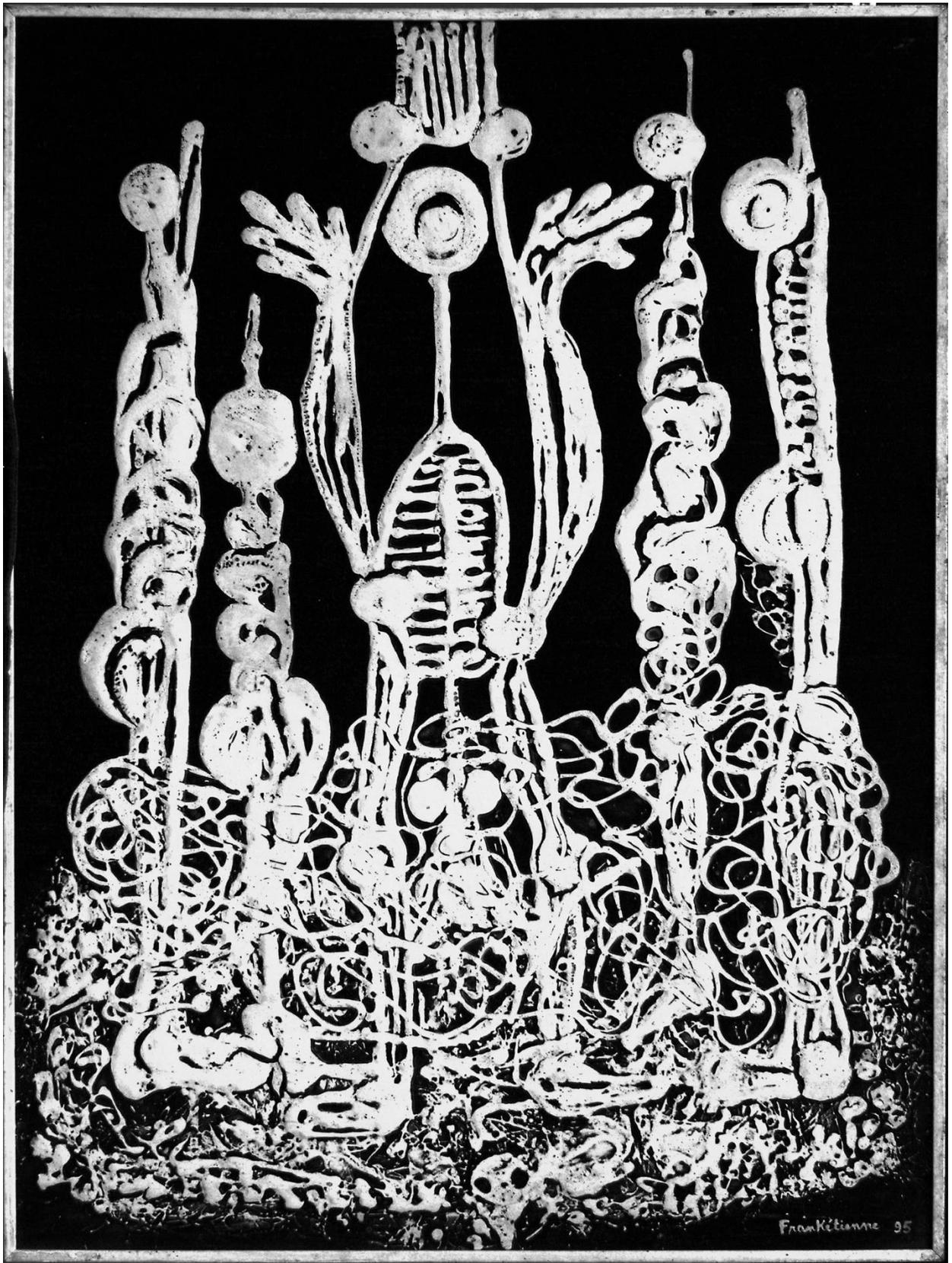
PEINTURE 7: PORT-AU-PRINCE, (HAÏTI), PEINTURE DE RUE  
(2012)



PEINTURE 8: FRANKÉTIENNE (HAÏTI)



PEINTURE 9: TROIS DIMENSIONS (ACHETÉE DANS LES RUES DE PORT-AU-PRINCE) # 9



PEINTURE 10 : FRANKÉTIENNE (HAÏTI)



PEINTURE 11: KRISTO NICOLAS, MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC

## CHAPTER V

# SOME HAITIAN POPULAR SYMBOLS REFLECTED IN THE ARTS

### La Citadelle Laferrière

This is the largest and highest fortress in the Americas. It was built after the



Haitian independence to prevent a return of Napoleon Bonaparte's troops who intended to re-establish slavery.

- First Haitian artwork, built between 1805 and 1820 by the Haitian leader Henri Christophe. (Of course, it was not built as artwork, it is only our opinion.)
- 108 000 square feet or 10 million square meters.
- Required 20 000 workers for its construction. Walls are 130 feet, (40 meters), high from the mountains and 10

feet thick. Its area is 108, 000 square feet or ten million meters.

- There are 365 canons of different sizes inside the Citadelle, most of them captured from Napoléon's ships.
- The Citadelle can store food and water for up to 5000 persons for a year.
- Symbol of emancipation of Black Slaves

- Symbol of Haitian genius
- Was designated, with the Sans-Souci palace as a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1982.
- Visiting the Citadelle, one sees canons captured from Napoleon's ships. One can count 365 canons in this fortress.

### **The Sans-Souci palace, Milot, Haiti,**



The Sans-Souci palace was the residence of the leader Henri Christophe, the same leader who built the Citadelle. An earthquake destroyed the palace and it was never rebuilt.

When Henri Christophe came to power right after Haitian independence, he encouraged artistic activities and initiated the construction of the Citadelle Laferrière. Although goals of the construction of the Citadelle Laferrière were to

Another great prowess of Henri Christophe besides building the Citadelle to guard against colonizers and pirates was: Every slave boat that arrives in the Atlantic at that time, Henri Christophe bought the entire boat and everyone become Haitians. That is another way he was fighting against slavery.

protect against a return of the colonizers, Henri Christophe wanted to demonstrate to the world outside Haiti the power and capability of Black African People. The Citadelle and the Sans-Souci palace stand as a testimony to their architectural taste and engineering prowess acquired from our ancestors from Egypt, Ethiopia and the Early Spain.

**Le Leader Henri Christophe (1807-1820) peinture par l'artiste  
Alexandra Barbot.**



## Le nègre marron

### The maroon (runaway slave)

Original sculpture by the Haitian architect and sculptor Albert Mangonès. This sculpture has been copied millions of times and in many sizes by many Haitian artists. The maroon is the person who refused to be enslaved. He escaped in the mountains and stayed there. He used his conch to call for the others to join him.

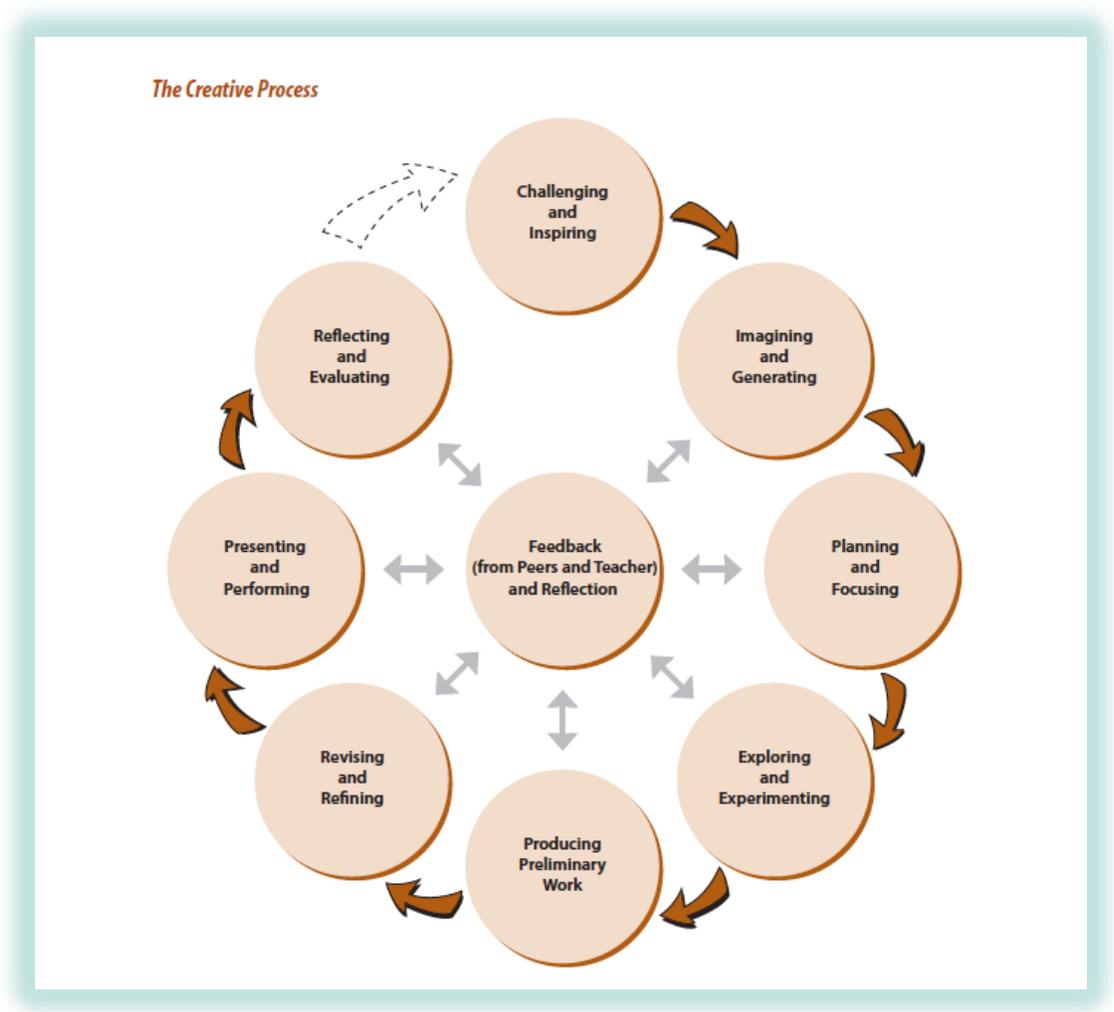


They organized themselves in the mountains in ways to prevent anyone who would want to return them to slavery. They later grew in numbers and

became one of the contributors and the 'artisans' of the revolutionary movement which culminated in the overturn of slavery and the establishment of freedom in St-Domingue which became Haiti.

# THE CREATIVE PROCESS

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SOURCE: ONTARIO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, THE ONTARIO CURRICULUM, GRADES 11, 12, THE ARTS, 2010, PAGE 16.

## THE VALUE OF ART<sup>2</sup>

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The exploration of the following guiding concepts will be facilitated through holistic and interrelated inquiry processes:

--fostering an understanding of the complex and diverse functions and purposes of art throughout history, cultures and societies (for example, art as a catalyst for change, art as decoration, functional art, advertising, religion, etc.)

--developing an identity of teacher as artist through further critical exploration and experimentation

--facilitating an understanding of respectful and safe methods of displaying students' work

--facilitating understanding of how the arts bring together divergent communities, people, and ideas to form new relationships and build understanding

--providing leadership in the application of the many transferable skills acquired through the study and practice of visual arts (for example, observation, creative problem solving, abstract thinking, critical thinking, communication skills, etc.)

--facilitating an understanding of the various pathways available to students studying art including; apprenticeships, co-op, post-secondary programs, and a wide variety of career pursuits and employment opportunities

--promoting an appreciation of the intrinsic value of creating art and the joy and fulfillment it can provide

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<sup>2</sup> Ref: Ontario College of Teachers, Additional qualifications courses Guideline, Visual Art Specialist, March 2016, page 13.

--creating and promoting opportunities to publically share and celebrate the visual arts achievement of the school/local community.

# HAITIAN ARTS OLD SCHOOLS VERSUS NEW TRENDS

BY FRED THOMAS<sup>1</sup>

Haitian art, in its diversity and originality, presents a colorful and multifaceted panorama of the Haitian culture, the country enchanting tropical landscapes and



Painting by Philome Obin

mystery as well, its aspirations toward perfection, universality, idealism, and the sublime. We deliberately limit our writing to the prevailing art styles and movements: The Primitive Painters and “The Moderns”. We stress, furthermore, the characteristics and contributions of both sides as far as objectives, styles and techniques are concerned. Our aim is to show that the so called Haitian art is not the offspring of one group in particular, but rather a mixture of all kinds of styles and tendencies running the gamut from the

early naïve experience to the most sophisticated approach of our time.



Vaudou in the Palace, Gérard Valcin, 1964



Girl with Dove, 1974, Jean-Rene Jerome

It all started with the “Ecole Indigeniste” comprised mostly of an array of primitive artists such as Castera Bazile, Pétion Savain, George Remponneau, Hector Hyppolite, Philome Obin and many others. Most of the time, with little or no formal training in art, these artists made it a point to record in their paintings aspects of Haitian life and culture while making the “Centre d’Art” their meeting point.

With his great talent, charisma, and Christian faith, Philomé Obin went on to create The School of Cap-Haitien (L’École du Cap-Haïtien), with his brothers Sénèque Obin, many of his sons, such as Télémaque Obin, Antoine Obin, Henry-Claude Obin as well as his grandsons, nephew (Michel Obin), other family members, neighbors and others like Max Gerbier, Buffon Thermidor, etc. If Philomé Obin’s affiliation to Protestantism did not allow him to paint voodoo scenes, he and his followers had a continuous source of inspiration in their immediate surrounding. The North Department’s picturesque sites, local and historical events, as well as their personal lives were limitless sources of inspiration. As a result, their paintings seem to convey to the onlooker a sense of serenity and decency, decorum, truthfulness and measure, thereby hope for the future. But some artists, dubbed “The Moderns”, such as Antonio Joseph,

Gesner Armand, Favrange Valcin, Luce Turnier, Bernard Wha, Lionel Saint-Eloi, Tiga and many others adopted a completely different view. To this list one must add the proponents of the “École de la Beauté”. This group includes painters like Jean-Rene Jerome, Bernard Séjourné, Sibil, Lyonel Laurenceau, Jean-Claude Legagneur, Philippe Dodard, and, later, Albert Desmangles. Mostly educated abroad, or coming from the elite, these artists were armed with their talents, enthusiasm, and knowledge of modern techniques that they learned in art schools, art books and museums all over the world. They took umbrage at the Primitives’ vision and opted to show a more sophisticated side of Haitian art, which was more attractive to a bourgeois taste. These artists were willing to take chances and experiment with modern techniques and styles such as abstraction, collage, mixed media, dripping, dabbing, controlled textures and so forth. They produced works appealing to the eye by consciously eschewing whatever was susceptible to suggest the misery of the Haitian people brought about by decades of short-sided administrations and political corruption.



Painting by Philippe Dodard

The idea was to create an idyllic world where everything appears to be perfect and everyone happy. Their paintings depict a surreal world where nothing was completely defined. Thus, People could interpret their work the way they wanted while closing their eyes to the abject reality around them and opting for a world of deception where, for example, a bird is not really a bird; a chair is not really a chair but the symbol of or an illusion to something else. This way no one felt threatened or guilty and the delusion could go on unabated forever. As in music, every song was about women, nostalgia, poetry, the sun, the moon and the stars. Art for Art’s sake. Life is beautiful in the best of worlds.

Both schools appeared to have reached their goals. The “Indigénistes” with their

lack or limited formal training strove to show a true image of Haiti by depicting local scenes, historical events, and daily activities of rural life, popular legends, religious ceremonies and so forth. The “Moderns,” on the other hand, exhibited their talents of colorists by presenting an ideal world which, if not representative of Haiti, showed, however, to the world that Haitian art was not limited to naïve art but was able to compete with contemporary artists all over the world by their mastery of modern techniques and gimmicks whether the aims were avant-gardism, expressionism or art for art’s sake.

A concise analysis cannot completely describe and explain the vast landscape of Haitian art from the outset of its exciting history up to the present time. It would, however, force critics and whomever is

interested to look with an open mind and see both sides of the same coin. It represents seemingly two different poles: the “Indigéniste School” (Primitive Art) with The “Cap-Haitien School” versus “The Moderns” represented by “L’École de la Beauté” while providing some crucial insights on the meaning of the interpellation. Haitian art is not only about naïve art but also all the educated and formally trained other artists who choose their subject matters for their aesthetical potential rather than anecdotal or realistic contents.

The questions remain. For example: Does the relevance of art depend on whether it is geared toward realism, being socially engaged or concerned with only aesthetical pursuits?

Since Haitian art seems to be at a crossroad where primitive and modern artists share the art market, where do we go from now?



Painting by Bernard Séjourné

Painting by Jean-Claude

# OBSERVATION, RESEARCH AND REFLECTIONS FOR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES STUDENTS

## HOMEWORK AND RESEARCH FOR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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Before initiating any research suggested by the guide, it is advisable to explore the Web on the elements of art(s) and principles of design. There are illustrations which accompany the notions and subsequently help in the clarification and the understanding of these notions.

### **Research # 1**

There are eleven paintings in chapter IV. All students must be able to identify at least three elements and one principle in each of the paintings. This exercise can be done in a group and animated by the Instructor / teacher

### **Research # 2**

Identify the main elements in Fred Thomas' painting #1.

Describe the principle of movement in Fred Thomas painting # 2. What are the characters doing in that painting? Describe the activity.

### **Research # 3**

Bob Corbett, retired professor from Webster University is in the process of building a list of Haitian artists, an index. Mr. Corbett is also building a bibliography of writing on Haitian arts:

References:

[Faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/Haiti/art/chart-1.htm](http://Faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/Haiti/art/chart-1.htm)

[Faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/Haiti/art/biblio.htm](http://Faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/Haiti/art/biblio.htm)

**Your research** is to count the number of artists he already located and the number of books he already compiles. Then write a one page, with two paragraphs of sixty words each in reflection on the status of Haitian arts according to your findings. Then start a class discussion about Haitian poverty and the creativity among its people.

### **Research # 4**

Invite a Haitian artist to the class, ask him or her to talk about Haitian arts.

The teacher would have a road map of the learning and explore the artist's work first. Associate his or her work with concepts and ideas in the visual arts literature. Communicate your objectives to the artist before he/she meets with the class. Respect the objectives of the visit and direct the acquisition of knowledge.

### **Research # 5**

Conduct a search on Street Arts in Haiti, from tap-tap bus in Port-au-Prince to Street painting exhibits on walls and in open markets in Port-au-Prince. Make it in power point forms and 3 pages of composition to present to the class. (Google: tap-tap bus in Haiti, Street Arts in Haiti)

### **Research # 6**

Organize a visit to the local museum. Before taking the students, the teacher would go himself or herself and observe how she/he can exploit some of the content of the museum to enhance students' progress. Write the learning objectives. Then, contact the museum to let them know of the visit. Plan with the museum and take the students. Back in class, a discussion would be useful to clarify, answer questions and give opinions. This will maximize learning and heighten the interest of the students.

Before initiating any research suggested by the guide, it is advisable to explore the Web on the elements of arts and principles of design. There are illustrations which accompany the notions and subsequently help in the clarification and the understanding of these notions.

### **Research # 1**

1. Observe artist's Robert Sylvain painting #1 and #2, chapter IV
2. Describe the artist's use of lines and color to convey movement.
3. What kind of movements do you see in this painting? Identify and describe at least two movements in each of Robert Sylvain's paintings on chapter IV.
4. Describe your feelings of harmony achieved through painting #1 and painting # 2.
5. Use your imagination to give a title to each of the two paintings.
6. You will need to write a minimum of 1000 to 1200 words to achieve this work.

### **Research # 2**

Explore the following websites and addresses, then identify two Haitian artists, one whose influence is African and one whose influence is European. Make a comparison between their artworks. Research them in detail and make a 10 minutes oral presentation in front of your group (of course you need to have written notes to deliver your presentation).

- [www.alpiart.com](http://www.alpiart.com)
- [www.laurenceau.ca](http://www.laurenceau.ca)
- [panamericanart.com/portfolio/Edouard-duval-carrie.2](http://panamericanart.com/portfolio/Edouard-duval-carrie.2)

- [www.voicesfromhaiti.com/inner-views/fred-thomas-art-is-in-my-soul](http://www.voicesfromhaiti.com/inner-views/fred-thomas-art-is-in-my-soul)
- [fineartamerica.com/profiles/fred-thomas.html?tab=artwork/](http://fineartamerica.com/profiles/fred-thomas.html?tab=artwork/)
- [www.voicesfromhaiti.com/inner-views/christian-nicolas-kristo-art/](http://www.voicesfromhaiti.com/inner-views/christian-nicolas-kristo-art/)
- [Kreyolicious.com/art-soul-alexandra-barbot-interview-painter/15497](http://Kreyolicious.com/art-soul-alexandra-barbot-interview-painter/15497)
- Look for the following artists on the web: Pierre Sylvain Augustin dit Payas, Frankétienne, Philippe Dodard, Dominique Ambroise, Fred Thomas, Alphonse Piard, Kristo (Christian) Nicolas, Édouard Duval-Carrié, Lyonel Laurenceau. Explore Haitian arts through the work of these artists; choose one that interests you and make a two-page composition with at least 1000 words with complete sentences, pictures. Then present to your class. These artists have Facebook pages and you can post there as well.

### **Research # 3**

The Harlem Renaissance movement in the United States

What is the Harlem Renaissance? Read the article written by Dr. Peggy Brooks-Bertram in chapter III of this brochure. Define the movement called Harlem Renaissance and explain how this movement born in Harlem was able to extend itself across Black Communities in the United States and beyond. Research 3 painters of the Harlem Renaissance who are already dead and three painters who are still alive.

Research 2 literary artists, 2 blues singers and two other artists of the Harlem Renaissance. Name them and justify your choice of these artists. Bring documents to your group and explain why it is important for the young people to know about the Harlem Renaissance movement. Explain the legacy of John Weldon Johnson to the African American culture of today. Explain the Harlem Renaissance legacy to the African Americans

and the Black communities today. (If possible, use slides and project in the class.

#### **Research # 4**

In a one page composition of at least 600 words, with complete sentences, describe, explain and comment on the painting # 11 in chapter IV. Explain what the artist is trying to convey. Discuss in class. You can share with the artist by posting your composition on his face book page.

#### **Research # 5**

Observe painting # 1 by Robert Sylvain and painting # 9 by Alpi. Describe in what way the two paintings are fundamentally different. Can we say that they are of the same genre? If not, how are they different? In two paragraphs of at least 60 words each compare these two paintings.

#### **Research # 6**

Go to the documentary, in the Bonus features, there is a short film of 13 minutes with Frankétienne, a great Haitian intellectual, then read the article of Fred Thomas titled, 'Haitian Arts: Old schools versus New trends'.

Take your time, reflect and write an article for a newspaper or a podcast to educate people about Haitian arts, with what you learned and your reflection on Haitian arts. (one thousand words)

#### **Research # 7**

Color Theory

Explore the color theory in Arts

In the western culture, the bride wears White, in several Asian cultures, the bride wears Red. In some countries when someone dies, the close family wears Black, while “the little black dress” is the top of elegance in Western culture. There is an association of color with culture, humor and

mood. In Chapter IV, we have two black and white paintings by Frankétienne. Describe these two paintings. What do you think the artist wants to convey in these paintings? Compare these two paintings with the painting # 5 and discuss the message conveyed by these paintings. With the use of an overhead projector, analyze with your group the message conveyed by the color or the lack of it in these paintings. (You must have notes from the readings in the exploration of the color theory. (Interesting as an oral presentation by more than one student.)

POEMS AND SONGS BY AFRICAN AMERICAN POETS  
AND SONGS WRITERS.

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**The Negro Speaks of Rivers**

**by Langston Hughes**

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 pyra-  
mids 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.

From *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*,  
edited by Arnold Rampersad (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 23.

## **I Dream a World**

**by Langton Hughes**

I dream a world where man  
No other man will scorn,  
Where love will bless the earth  
And peace its paths adorn.  
I dream a world where all  
Will know sweet freedom's way,  
Where greed no longer saps the soul  
Nor avarice blights our day.  
A world I dream where black or white,  
Whatever race you be,  
Will share the bounties of the earth  
And every man is free,  
Where wretchedness will hang its head  
And joy, like a pearl,  
Attends the needs of all mankind--  
Of such I dream, my world!

From *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, edited by Arnold Rampersad (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 311.

## **I, Too**

**by Langston Hughes**

I, too sing America.  
I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.  
Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.  
Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed--  
I, too, am America.

From *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, edited by Arnold Rampersad  
(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 46.

