

## **Using Image and Primary Sources to Understand the Past: The Great Migration**

**NCSS Thematic Strand:** Time, Continuity and Change  
**Grade Level:** 7-12

**Class Periods Required** Two 45 minute classes

### **Purpose, Background and Context:**

The time surrounding and including the 1920s in the United States saw much change, movement and adaption. The period of time known as the Great Migration described the movement of African Americans within the United States to northern industrial cities. At the start of World War I, 90% of African Americans lived in the South. During the years of 1910-1920 half a million African Americans migrated to northern cities such as; New York (Harlem), Chicago, Detroit. This movement changed the urban environment and redefined the African American experience in American history. Many historians look to the Great Migration as a pivotal moment in race relations within the American experience. The movement of specific populations forced American society to address issues of racism, violence, economic independence and education. By examining the landscape present during the Great Migration students can gain a better understanding of the African American perspective of this time period.

### **Goals/Objectives/Student Outcomes/Performance Expectations:**

#### **Students Will:**

- **Use image and documents to interpret the past**
- **Employ process of critical historical inquiry to attain familiarity with historical perspectives**
- **Analyze primary documents to understand historical moments**

#### **Materials:**

Copy or large print of; *The Dove*, Romare Bearden ("Picturing America" material)  
Copy of, "My Early Days in Harlem", Langston Hughes (from Freedom Ways )  
Copy of, "Sir I Will Thank You with All My Heart" : 7 Letters from the Great Migration, (historymatters.com)

## **Procedures:**

### **DAY 1**

#### **Procedure 1: warm-up 5-10 minutes**

Display image, *The Dove* (Romare Bearden), in front of class. As students enter classroom they hear Jazz music playing. The warm-up prompt is;

“View the image, *The Dove*, and listen to the music. Write a free-write journal entry.”  
Some questions to consider....What environment is depicted, what are the people doing, who are the people, how does the music connect to the image, what does the dove in the image suggest?

#### **Procedure 2: 10 minutes**

Discuss student responses. Students will record responses on board answering; who, what, where, why and when with their ideas generated through warm-up.

After student responses are recorded instructor introduces “The Great Migration”, describing the 5 W’s of this historical concept. (All of this can be recorded in student notes below “free write” entry.)

#### **Procedure 3: 20 minutes (depending on students’ reading abilities)**

Students should be divided in groups (2-3 in group). They will be given Langston Hughes, “Early Days in Harlem” and “7 letters from The Great Migration” and Reading Questions.

In groups students will read the two documents together. While reading they will collect data about sensory information of the environment of The Great Migration. Students will also answer questions that connect the writings to the image of *The Dove*.

While reading students are encouraged to use active reading techniques and write questions to further discussion, underline unknown words and generate questions to expand understanding.

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#### **Procedure 4: closing 2-5 minutes**

Conclude that responses will be discussed tomorrow in class. Collect completed “reading questions” to review student responses.

## **DAY 2**

### **Procedure 1: *warm-up* 5 minutes**

Students will respond to the following prompt; “Define THE GREAT MIGRATION in at least 3 sentences.” (Students may use text books to find/create a definition, and can review notes from Day 1, and/or responses from Reading Questions)

### **Procedure 2: 15-20 minutes**

As a class develop a set definition for The Great Migration, record class definition on the board.

Students will share their responses to the reading questions from Day 1. (if needed students may re-group to complete questions) Responses can be recorded on board or overhead for student notes. Throughout discussion of student responses instructor should supplement responses with additional information for the Great Migration. While sharing responses, instructor should ask students to discuss any questions generated from “active reading”.

Concluding question to student responses-; What problems arose from The Great Migration? This question will lead to a discussion of racism, race riots, violence, civil rights issues.

### **Procedure 3 20 minutes**

Individual activity: Students are prompted to write their own historical account of The Great Migration. Students will use the answers to their questions and class discussion to write a “letter home”. Students will take the perspective of a new migrant who is now living in the North. In their letter they should include some positive experience and negative experiences they wish to discuss with their friends and family still in the South. Students may use other forms of writing within their letter, such as poems and cartoons that were discussed in the writings from Day 1.

### **Procedure 4 *closing* 2-5 minutes**

Collect finished student letters &/or assign letters as homework to be collected the next day.

**Assessment of Outcome:****Students will:**

- Analyze both the image of *The Dove* and the texts; “My Early Days in Harlem”, “7 Letters of The Great Migration” as depictions of The Great Migration landscape.
- Express their interpretation of the environment of The Great Migration through synthesis of information in a first person perspective letter, as a migrant from the south to the north in this time period of American history.

**Extensions and Adaptations:**

Write 2-Voice Poems in various Great Migration perspectives; northerner vs. southern; white vs. black; male vs. female (with racial components, or regional as well), child vs. adult, etc.

Students could make collage art (in style of *The Dove*) expressing concepts of The Great Migration

Compare and contrast The Great Migration to other groups of the “Roaring Twenties”

**Resources**

In Motion: The African American Migration Experience (The Great Migration)

<http://www.inmotionaame.org/home.cfm>

History Matters: The US Survey Course on the Web (The Great Migration)

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/>

Picturing America: teachers resource book

## Reading Questions

Student Names \_\_\_\_\_

While reading, chart what this time period looked like through the examples given in the texts (“Early Days in Harlem” & “7 Letters from The Great Migration”). *At least 3 examples in each.*

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What were the motives of African Americans to move during The Great Migration?

How does the image, *The Dove*, depict what you read from the letters and Langston Hughes?

What could the white dove in the image symbolize for this historical moment, The Great Migration?