

# Harlem

## RENAISSANCE



Dona Herweck Rice



# Reader's Guide

1. What was the Harlem Renaissance?
2. How was jazz poetry like jazz music?
3. In what ways did culture play a role in the Harlem Renaissance?
4. Explain why the Harlem Renaissance was an important time period in U.S. history.
5. What effects of the Harlem Renaissance are felt in the United States today?
6. Pretend you are the owner of the Savoy Ballroom. Create an ad that encourages people to come dance at your establishment.

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# The A Train

The piano dives into a melody with a playful sweep of jitter and bounce. The piano notes are answered by a trumpeting blast of horns. Low and deep, the bass plucks a **syncopated** beat as the cool drum lays down a jolting rhythm. And while the music plays, Ella Fitzgerald stands poised at the microphone. She looks magnificent in a shimmering gown and a high hairdo. She begins to add a new instrument—her voice—to the melody. Fitzgerald weaves a spellbinding **scat**. But the horns are demanding, pushing Fitzgerald to slide and dive into the swinging lyrics of the classic jazz standard.

*You must take the A train,  
To go to Sugar Hill way up in Harlem.  
If you miss the A train  
You find you've missed the quickest way to Harlem.  
Hurry! Get on now, it's coming.  
Listen to those rails a-thrumming.  
Oh boy, get on the A train.  
Soon you will be on Sugar Hill in Harlem.*

“Take the A Train” is an old-school jazz song. Billy Strayhorn wrote it for Duke Ellington and his **orchestra**. It became a signature song for both Ellington and Fitzgerald. Strayhorn wrote the song in a tribute to the New York City subway train he rode into Harlem, New York. He claimed that writing it felt just like writing a letter to an old friend.

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