

Activity Guide

Poetry from the Masters: The Pioneers

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Illustrated by Stephan J. Hudson Published by Just Us Books

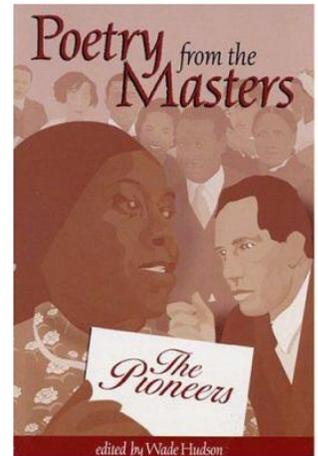
Surveying more than 200 years of poetic creativity in Black America, *Poetry from the Masters: The Pioneers* introduces the work of early Black poets who helped to establish an African- American poetic tradition. Readers will explore the poetry of eleven talented women and men, including Phillis Wheatley, Francis Ellen Harper, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen. Poems are complemented by a biography that discusses the scope and content of each writer's work, as well as his or her historical significance and impact on the literary world.

Target Ages: 9-12

Themes: poetry, black history, literature, black writers, American history

Pre-Reading:

Look at the cover of the book. Do you recognize any of the poets? Have you read any of their poems? Share what you know.



What is a pioneer? What does it mean to be a pioneering poet?

Discussion Questions:

- When did the African-American poetic tradition begin? What were some of the obstacles these early poets faced? How did they overcome them?
- How did the times influence the work of these poets? How did their work evolve and grow? How did the rich artistic period of the Harlem Renaissance enrich the work of black poets?
- What is a folk poet?
- How do the illustrations in the book complement the text?
- What were the arguments for and against poets like Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson using Black dialect in their work? What do you think of this form?
- Why do you think some poets resisted the label, "Negro poet," while others embraced it? How did music influence the work of poets like Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown?
- Poems can affirm, protest, celebrate. Talk about the many ways the poets in the book used their work.
- Who was your favorite poet in the book? Why?
- What poetic traditions are celebrated by young people today? How does it draw from the work of the past?

Define these words and phrases:

poet
pioneer
tradition
abolitionist suffragette
dialect
Harlem Renaissance anthology
Black Arts Movement empowerment identity

WRITING/LANGUAGE ARTS

- Choose two poets in the book. What are the differences and similarities in their poems? What images do they use? Identify poetic devices such as metaphors and similes.
- Some poets find inspiration around them. Write a poem drawn from your life.
- Create a poetry journal where you record ideas for future poems.

ART

- Pick a poem and draw a picture inspired by the images it evokes.
- Choose a poet from the book and make a collage that expresses themes in their work and life.

MUSIC

Recite poems by Langston Hughes to jazz or blues. Does it change the tone or meaning?

HISTORY

- Research the Harlem Renaissance. Where did it start? What was it like? Who were some of the major poets from that time?
- How was poetry used as a form of protest? What historical examples were discussed in the book?

About the Editor

Wade Hudson has written and edited nearly 20 books for young people including *Places I Love To Go*, *Powerful Words: More Than 200 Years of Extraordinary Writing by African Americans*, and *Book of Black Heroes: Scientists, Healer, and Inventors*. He is CEO and co-founder with his wife Cheryl, of Just Us Books, an independent publishing company that specializes in Black-interest books for young readers.

About the Illustrator

Stephan J. Hudson is an illustrator, graphic designer and owner of the design company, 2nd Chapter. He has designed numerous children's book covers and interiors. His photography is featured in the book *Prayers for the Smallest Hands*.

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