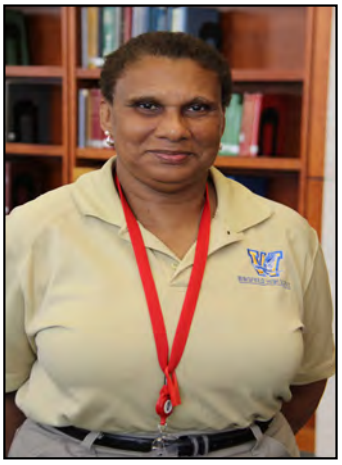
The Great Migration Converges with Poetry and the Blues

Objectives: The students will learn and explore the connections between the oppressive conditions of the Jim Crow South, the Great Migration, and the music and literature which grew out of the movement from the South to the North.

The *Great Migration Converges with Poetry and the Blues* lesson plan is adaptable for grades 8-12.

Curricular Connections		
Common Core Language Arts	Grade 8	RL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; RI 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9; W 2, 4, 5, 8, 9; SL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; L 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; RH 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9; WHST 2, 4, 5, 8, 9
	Grades 9-10	RL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7; RI 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8; W 2, 4, 5, 8, 9; SL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; L 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; RH 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 ,9; WHST 2, 4, 5, 8, 9
	Grades 11-12	RL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; RI 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7; W 2, 4, 5, 8, 9; SL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; L 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; RH 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9; WHST 2, 4, 5, 8, 9
Social Studies	Mississippi Studies	6a
	U.S. History from Post-Reconstruction to the Present	4a; 5c; 7a
	Minority Studies	1a
	African American Studies	1c; 2b; 6b; 7a; 7b
	Problems in American Democracy	5d



"No matter how much we think we know, there is always room for humans to be open to new ideas and new ways to embrace our humanity."

Ina Neal Watson teaches in the International Baccalaureate Program at Jim Hill High School in Jackson, Mississippi. Her major achievements are that she is still enjoying her life and the profession of teaching. Ina joined the MDAH Teachers Advisory Group after she participated in the first annual Summer Teachers School of 2015.

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Materials: "The South;" "One-Way Ticket;" *Percy Family Papers (23 documents); The Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance;* Internet; *The Most Southern Place on Earth Excerpt; Four Squares Writing Graphic Organizer; From the Cotton Fields to the Blues;* "Times Is Getting Harder;" "Back Water Blues;" *Venn Diagram.*

Procedures:

Activity One: The Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance

1. Distribute Langston Hughes' poem "The South" to students.
2. Have students read individually or popcorn read (students take turns reading aloud to the class).
3. Then lead the class in a discussion based on the following questions:
   - What does the poem reveal about life in the South?
   - What does the poem suggest is the solution to life in the South?
   - What does the poem reveal about life in the North?
4. Distribute Hughes' poem "One-Way Ticket" to students.
5. Have students verbally compare and contrast the two poems in style, rhetoric, and content.
6. Propose the following discussion questions to the class:
   - What do these poems suggest about conditions in the South?
   - What solution is offered for the problems that African Americans must deal with in the South?
   - What places does Hughes suggest African Americans will go?
7. Distribute copies of the *Percy Family Papers* to students.
8. Have students read individually or in small groups.
9. After reading, distribute *The Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance* for students to complete.

Activity Two: Jim Crow in the Delta

1. At this time, allow students to conduct individual research on the Internet to gain a general understanding of Jim Crow laws, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Great Migration.
2. Distribute *The Most Southern Place on Earth Excerpt* and the *Four Squares Writing Graphic Organizer.*
3. Have students read the excerpt and complete the *Four Squares Writing Graphic Organizer,* which will require students to develop a topic sentence, opening supportive sentence, supportive sentences and a summary sentence.
4. Have students write and present their resulting essays to the class.

Activity Three: From the Cotton Fields to the Blues

1. Distribute *From the Cotton Fields to the Blues,* "Times Is Getting Harder," "Back Water Blues," and the *Venn Diagram* to students.
2. Have students read the handout and read through the lyrics of both blues pieces.
3. If time allows, listen to "Times Is Getting Harder" available at http:historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5333/.
4. Have students complete the *Venn Diagram* to compare the two songs and explain how bluesmen used a historical event like the Great Migration to highlight the lives of the common people who left the South.

Extension Activities:

1. Students can learn further information on the Great Migration by reading "Seven Letters from the Great Migration" available at http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5332. These letters reflect the feelings and desires of thousands of African Americans, who were anxious to leave the South during this time period. The *Venn*

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Diagram can be used to compare and contrast the letters on the website.

2. To explore and listen to more Mississippi blues, log onto http://www.pbs.org/theblues or access *The Mississippi Blues Trail and Beyond*, a classroom curricular guide from the Mississippi Arts Commission, available at http://www.arts.ms.gov/special-projects/blues-trail.php.
3. Learn more about the Great Migration through primary and secondary sources, images, and short stories in the lesson plan *The Great Migration and Its Effects on the African American Population of Mississippi* available at http://www.mdah.ms.gov/new/learn/classroom-materials/lesson-plans-and-teaching-units/.

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“The South” ***by Langston Hughes***

The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth.
The sunny-faced South,
    Beast-strong,
    Idiot-brained.
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire’s ashes
For a Negro’s bones.
    Cotton and the moon,
    Warmth, earth, warmth,
    The sky, the sun, the stars,
    The magnolia-scented South.
Beautiful, like a woman,
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
    Passionate, cruel,
    Honey-lipped, syphilitic —
    That is the South.
And I, who am black, would love her
But she spits in my face.
And I, who am black,
Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me.
    So now I seek the North —
    The cold-faced North,
    For she, they say,
    Is a kinder mistress,
And in her house my children
May escape the spell of the South.

Langston Hughes, *Selected Poems by Langston Hughes* (New York: Random House, 1959), 173.

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“One-Way Ticket” *by Langston Hughes*

I pick up my life
And take it with me
And I put it down in
Chicago, Detroit,
Buffalo, Scranton,
Any place that is
North and East —
And not Dixie.

I pick up my life
And take it on the train
To Los Angles, Bakersfield,
Seattle, Oakland, Salt Lake,
Any place that is
North and West —
And not South.

I am fed up
With Jim Crow laws,
People who are cruel
And afraid,
Who lynch and run,
Who are scared of me
And me of them.

I pick up my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket —
Gone up North,
Gone out West,
Gone!

Langston Hughes, *Selected Poems by Langston Hughes* (New York: Random House, 1959), 177.

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Percy Family Papers
(23 documents)

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Greenville, Miss. Nov. 29th., 1905t.

Sarah Compton,

465 West 131st Street,

New York City.

Ching:-

I am sorry to tell you that the darkey renting Egypt will not be able to carry out his rent contract for next year. He made no crop, and can get no one to advance him, the rent being payable monthly.

You will be compelled to rent the place next year with the rent payable in the fall, and I do not know now what rent can be made.

Tenants generally are going to have a difficult time to get any one to carry them. What do you want me to do about it?

Yours truly,

Dictated.

This document has not been deacidified

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July 7th., 1906t.

Sarah Compton,

New York, N. Y.

"Ching":-

I have had an offer by a negro named Randolph Menefee for your place for the next three years. He offers to pay $4.00 per acre, making $320.00 for the place; this includes the store, but not the house in which "Little Ann" lives. He wants the place for either three or five years. This is rather a small rental, but, under the circumstances, I advise leasing the place to him for three years. The place is out of repair, and has grown up badly this year, and labor is scare in that section. I rather doubt if a better offer could be had, and this seems to be a very reliable darkey. He has always run himself, says he has mules and force enough to work it, and has operated aplace larger than this for a number of years, above Greenville, being a piece of land he purchased from "old Helm", whom possibly you may recall. He wishes to leave his present place on account of sipe water, and it will cost him probably a c couple of hundred dollars to get your place in good condition. I am willing to try to get a better offer, and to advertise the place if you wish it, but I believe that this negro will carry out the lease, and that, at the end of the time, the place will be in a better condition, and command a better rental than it does now.

Write me at once so that I can give this man an answer before I go away.

Your friend,

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July 17th., 1906t.

Menefee Randolph,

Greenville, Miss.

Menefee:-

I have received an answer from New York. The party does not wish to rent the Compton place to you on the terms stated. I am going out of town this week, to be gone for a couple of months, and I want you to see the piece of land about which I wrote you. I know that it will suit you because there is no better land in the Delta; and the houses are new and good, and I can let you have any amount up to 100 acres, and am willing to make a one year rental, or three to five years. Suppose when you get this, you come in to see O. B. Crittenden and Company, and I will leave directons with them about the land. You can go and take a look at it in a day without any trouble, getting back here on the Bigleben train in the evening, and I will pay your expenses, so that if it does not suit you, you will be nothing out.

Yours truly,

Dictated.

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November 30th., 1907s.

Sarah Compton,
502 ~~North~~ West 136th., Street,
New York City.

Ching:

I succeededin making the lease to Garner for three years, with privelege of renting at the same price for two more, The property is leased to E E Richardson and his wife Susie Richardson.

I don't recall, but my impression is that the property belongs to Anna for life, remainder to you, so I make the lease to be signed by both. Both are to execute it and acknowledge it, and return it to me, and I will then have the notes signed and returned to you. I was really very much surprised in being able to get the deal through. I think is is an excellent lease for you.

Yours truly,

Dictated.

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In consideration of an annual rental of $400.00 a year, which is evidenced by three promissory notes of the lessees herein, payable to the order of Sarah Compton, at the First National Bank, of Greenville, Mississippi, on the 1st., day of November, of each year of this lease, all of said notes being of even date herewith, we, Anna Hurst and Sarah Compton, do hereby rent, lease and demise unto E E Richardson and Susie Richardson, that certain tract of land situated in the County of Washington, State of Mississippi, known as the Egypt Plantation, consisting of 80 acres of cleared land, and 20 acres of woodland, being the only land owned by us, or either of us, in said County: said lease to be for a period of three years beginning January 1st., 1908 and terminating December 31st., 1910. We are to keep the taxes upon the property paid, and are to be at no other expense in connection with it. The lessees are to return the property with the improvements thereon, in as good condition as it is now, reasonable wear and tear excepted.

The house occupied by Henrietta Compton is to be reserved for her use, and is excepted from the lease.

The lessees herein, or either of them, have the right to renew this lease for two years, by giving written notice thereof to us of their intention to so renew it on or before the 15th., day of November of the last year of the lease, accompanying said notice with their two rent notes of $400.00 each, for the years 1911 and 1912.

Witness our signatures this _____day of December, 1907.

_____

_____

State of New York.

County of _____.

Personally appeared before the undersigned, a Notary Public, in and for the City of New York [illegible] the within named [illegible] and [illegible] signed [illegible]

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December 31st., 1908t.

Miss Sophie Reiser,

1379 lexington Ave., New York City.

My dear Miss Reiser:-

Yours of the 23rd to hand. I will find out about the taxes on the property, and let you know. I know thatbyou are very much harassed, even without your Mother's illness, with the condition of the property, and I wish that I could give you some definite advice as to the best course to pursue, but it is a difficult proposition to handle.

You ask that I take hold of the property as if it were my own. If it were my place, I would employ a manager, and go to the expense of getting labor upon the property, and the further expense of agreeing to advance this labor during the year, in order to make a crop. This, of course, would involve a very considerable outlay, with the result doubtful; and I do not know whether you are in a position to incur any such expense in regard to the property. It is impossible to make any lease of the place in bulk, for the ensuing year. The apprehension in regard to the boll-weevil is so great that no one will undertake to handle the property. I do not feel disposed to release Saunders from his liability. He writes me under date of Dec. 23rd., 1908, as follows: " I have repeated warned Mrs Reiser that I am financially unable to carry out the lease on her place ". The letter is written on the bill head of F. W. Saunders and Company, and I am writing to Little Rock today to ascertain something in regard to Mr. Saunders financial responsibility.

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There are some negroes upon the place that have been apparently good tenants, and hate to leave. I have written them to come to see me, and I am satisfied that a lease of the land can be made to some of them. My idea is to lease it at almost any price to any negroes who are able to secure advances, and then to advise Mr. Saunders that you decline to release him from his rental obligation, but would in the face of his declination to pay rent, try to protect yourself by leasing as much of the property as is possible, and then hold him for the difference.

If you were in a position to advance these negroes in cash, through the Bank here, as much as fifty cents per acre per month, I expect that all of them who have not left the place could be kept on it, but I dount if they will be able to make any arrangements for advances. It is a dangerous thing, situated as you are, to make these advances, but the alternative, provided you have the money with which to make it, is worse, namely, the place lying idle, and the consequent depreciation in value.

Write me what you can do about this, and as soon as the negroes come up here, I will write you further.

Since starting this letter, I have heard that it is barely possible that a man named Dickerson, who owns a place adjoining your mother's, might possibly buy the property, or lease it. I will write him at once about it. Would you care to make a sale?

I hope the New Year will be a good one, to the extent anyway, that your good mother may be restored to health.

With best wishes, I am,

Dic. Your friend,

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June 2nd, 1909s.

Mrs. Johanna Reiser,

New York City.

Dear Madam:

I enclose you a letter from Peter Brown, one of your tenants, not that sending it to you will be of any service, but merely as an illustration of the letters which I am constantly receiving from the negroes on the place. I don't know that anything at all can be done about this, nor do I know hos much of it is based on fact and how much to be attributed to the imagination of the writer.

I very strongly apprehend that any rent received from that property will have to be made out of Saunders.

Yours truly,

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June 4th, 1909s.

Mr. A. C. Peets,

Alhambra, Miss.

Dear Sir:

Your letter of June 1st to hand. I presume you refer to the place belonging to Mrs. Hohanna Reiser. She wishes to sell it, but I am not in a position to give you a price on it at this time. If you will make an offer on the property I will communicate it to Mrs. Reiser and let you know the result.

As to renting it, there are several negroes on the place who have made contracts for this year. How much land they are renting I do not know. I would be willing to rent you all of the land not now occupied by tenants for $2.50 an acre for the year 1909, you to take possession of said land, and the amount of land, if we cannot agree upon it, will be ascertained by survey.

Yours truly,

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February 14th, 1910s.

Mr. L. W. Baldwin,

Superintendent.

Dear Sir:

The tenants on the place of Mrs. J. Keiser, near Foote, Miss. are complaining that the railroad has allowed one of their crossings to fall into such a state of disrepair that it is impossible to get across the railroad at that point.

Will you kindly look into the matter and see if the railroad is at fault.

Yours truly,

WAP

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June 1, 1910. 211

Mrs. Johann Reiser,

New York, N. Y.

Dear Mrs. Reiser:-

The old negro who is sort of the head of affairs down at your place, who wears the long plat of hair across his forehead, was in our office this morning and gave very encouraging reports of the condition that your place is in. He says only about 70 acres are lying out and that the crops are in very good shape. He further quotes Mr. Law as having said that the outlook was as good for your place as almost any place on the Lake. What truth there was in these statements I am unable to say but the old negro seemed to be sincerely pleased with himself and with the way things were looking from a farmers point of view.

He informed me that certain Italian tenants of Mr. Skinners' were trespassing on one or two acres of your land and after having cleared it were raising cotton on it. We today wrote Mr. Skinner that we would hold the tenants for the rent of the land they are using.

I sincerely hope that you have been happier since living in Greenville. My father has not yet returned from Washington and does not hope to do so before July 1. You can realize how very much worried and chagrined he has been over the numerous reports that his adversaries in politics have been spreading. I almost wish now as he has wished since the begining that he had not gone into this miserable affair. It has been too much of a strain

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June 1, 1910.

Mr. Joshua Skinner,

Foote, Miss.

Dear Mr. Skinner:-

We have been advised that some of the Italian on your place have gotten over the boundry line between your place and the place of Mrs. Johanna Reiser and after having partly cleared some of Mrs. Reiser's land are now cultivating it. This is probably unknown to you and of little interest to you but we wish you would kindly inform your Italian tenants who are so engaged that they will be held for the rent of the land that they are working. We shall, of course taking this step as Mrs. Reiser's attorneys.

Yours very truly,

WAP-MPS

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July 27, 1910.

Mrs. Johanna Rieser,
#1379 Lexington Avenue,
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mrs. Rieser:-

Your letter in answer to mine came just before fathdr left on a trip, politically in its nature. I submitted the proposition made to you to him and he asked me to write you for him urging the advisability of selling your property here. It may be possible to get $16,000 or $17,000 for the place but seems little hope for a higher price. The best planters down here expect the boll weevil to make its appearance this year as it has already appeared at Glen Allen and no one can expect to last through the first few years of boll weevil unless he can personally supervise the planting on his place and have plenty of funds to back him. Further than this the ditches on your place are in a bad condition and the houses are in a bad state of affairs. Of course, this matter is one to be decided solely by you but thought it best to let you have fathers opinion on the subject.

With kindest regards, I am,

Sincerely,

WAP-MPS

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1379 Lexington Ave.
Br. Y. Oct. 17/10

Mr. Wm Percy.
Greenville, Miss.

Dear Sir I have delayed answering your letter of Oct. 5th until I heard from my tenants. I thank you for your kind interest but at present do not care to consider any $1000.00 rental for my plantation as it is still too early. – if possible I would like to rent the place again to the present tenants. One and all write they are well satisfied with this year's crop and are ready to pay this rental note due Nov. 1st. During my stay in Greenville I rented to the following.

Simon Brantley	15 acres	@ $5.00 per acre	—	$75.00
Willie Howe	15 "	@ $3.50 " "	—	52.50
Peter Brown	25 "	@ $5.00 " "	—	125.00
Frank Morris	25 "	@ 5.00 " "	—	125.00
Minerva Robertson	20 "	@ 5.00 " "	—	100.00
Solem Counts	45 "	@ 5.00 " "		225.00
Charlie Thomas	30 "	@ 5.00 house barn Store &	—	200.00
Friend of Charlie Thomas	10 "	@ 5.00		50.00

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The balance of the land on leaving Greenville I offered for $30.00 per acre. and I understand from Peter Brown that Mr. Penner, some Italians and some of the colored tenants rented this land. — just how much I do not know and so I beg of you to send for Peter Brown. and have him give you the exact amount and collect this money for me. as I haven't any rental notes for this land.

Mr. Le Roy Percy and I promised Peter Brown 50¢ per acre for Each acre he rented which represents.

Frank Morris 25 acres
Minerva Robertson 20 "
Selem Amos 45 "

90 acres. @ 50¢ = $45.00

kindly pay him this amount.

The reason that Mlle Hous has such cheap rent is he claimed Mr. Le Roy Percy promised him the land for that price, this was before I undertook the renting myself. but this year I will not let him have it for that price.

Charlie Thomas has the house, store barn & 30 acres. for the small amount of $200.00 — you know the circumstances only too well. I want his rent raised to a normal sum as stated before my tenants all with they are more than satisfied with their crops, even with the bell weevil

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3 this year. But ask for a reduction of rent next year. and which I don't feel justified in granting for. I rented it to them at $5.00 an acre to give them a fair start — land that usually brings $10.00 & more per acre.

I will notify my tenants to come to your office Nov. 1st and pay you the rental: and to draw up new contracts.

Continually offering me your services Mr. Percy I feel you will protect my interest as much as possible and I would like to keep the rents at $5.00 per acre. at least.

With kindest regards to you and your parents in which my daughter joins

Very respectfully
Johanna Rieser.

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November 10, 1910.

Mrs. Johanna Reiser,

#1379 Lexington Avenue,

New York, N. Y.

Dear Mrs.Reiser:-

I beg to acknowledge receipt of the following amounts of money paid into me as agent by your tenants:

From Simon Brantley,	(15 acres at $5.00 an acre)	75.00
" Peter Brown,	(20 " " $5.00 " " less $45.00 commissions)	80.00
" Frank Morris,	(25 acres at $5.00 an acre)	125.00
" Minerva Robison,	(20 " " $5.00 " ")	225.00
Ishem Ishem Coombs,	(45 " " $5.00 " ")	225.00
Charl Charlie Thomas,	(40 " " $250.00)	300.00
	35 " " $3.00 an acre)	
" Joshua Skinner,	(14 " " $3.00 " "	42.00
TOTAL		$947.00

for which amount we enclose you New York Exchange.

You will note Willie Howe renting 15 acres at $3.50 per acre has not paid up and that Charlie Thomas still owes $55.00. I have heard nothing from Willie Howe, and Charlie Thomas is complaining of the amount of acreage charged against him. I have written to both of these negroes threating to prosecute them unless they paid the amounts due. I understand from Peter Brown that an Italian on Mr. Skinner's place took one or two acres of your land but there seems to be some conflict as to the facts and $6.00 is not enough to bring suit on, so I shall make no further

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effort to collect that amount.

I would suggest that next year you place all of the rent notes in the First National Bank heréefor collection as it is a considerable worry for us to bother with the tenants, who have each one a tale of woe and some long winded excuse to reduce the rental.

I shall renew the contracts with the present tenants, if they so desire, keeping the rent the same as it was last year. Peter Brown seems to have done well but he is unpopular with the other tenants and with the neighboring land-lords, and,of course, like all negro's he will make what attempt he can to foster his own interest rather than yours. Peter says that no land on the place is rented other than that which I have referred to above, and I suppose his statement is true, though I have no way of knowing personally.

You will understand that my fathers' and my advice is to try and rent the place to one tenant, if a reliable white man could be found to take it. It is quite impossible for us to adequately protect your interest,as long as negro tenants occupy the place, without making repeated trips to the plantation itself, which we cannot do. This, however, is a matter entirely within your discretion, and unless we hear from you at once we shall sign up next week rent notes to as many negro's as possible. You have every right to be pleased with your emperiment this year, but

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Mrs. J. R. ---------3

I am free to confess that I never expected you to collect one-half the rent due. As soon as the amounts due from Willie Howe and Charlie Thomas are paid I shall forward same to you.

Trusting that you and your daughter are enjoying the best of health, I beg to remain,

Yours very truly,

WAP-MPS

Enclosures.

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Copy

1379 Lex. Ave.
N. Y. Nov 25/10

Mrs. J. Rieser
Dear Madam.
This comes to let you know how I am, I am very well in health but not in mind. dear madam I written you sometime ago, stating that I had after very late broke up some more land over and above my contracts but after breaking up it rained so much until I did not have chance to make enough to pay me for putting it in. I put the land in on this account. it was right at me. and that if I should fail this year that it would be in better shape for me next year, or for some one else. but rather to have any words I did pay to Mr. Wm Percy $385.00 — Mr. Percy told me that I had to pay for 75 acres and I did for same. I dont blame Mr. Percy because he dont know just how many acres I am working no more then Mr. Brown tell him — of course Mrs Rieser I am the only tenant on your place working more land over & above contract. I hope that you understand me Mrs Rieser, but it is very hard to make flesh of one tenant and bone of another. I am satisfied on your place and have renewed my contract for next year & do truly hope that I will do well next year.
Yours truly tenant Charlie Thomas.

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Nov. 23/10
Rock Miss

Mrs. J. Reiser
N.Y. City

Mrs. Reiser I Wm H. Horn. Col Tenant & Servant.
Received your letter some time ago telling me to go to the Bank & pay my rent: I was not able to make it to the Bank on Nov 1st on account of not being able to gin any cotton before that time, but as soon as I could gin I told Mr. Law to mail Mr. Percy a check to cover same which he did not do for several days later on account of being so busy at this time of the year. During the time Mr. Law's delaying the check I received a letter from Mr. Moody & Percy stating that I worked 3 acres of land over my rent when I could hardly work 15 a on account of my taking all weed land again this year. as I promised you I would do. I plowed up about 3 a of weed land and planted it down in corn, about July thinking that I would work it up good and keep the weeds down in it and if I could I would try to work it next year. or probably some one else would work it. but the rains made the weeds take the corn but I chopped down the weeds after the rain stopped and tried to plow it out but it being very stiff buck shot land it was to hard to plow so I took my plow & skim the ground through it any way, and it left it in a very nice shape to be worked next year.

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I gathered about 1/2 sack of corn nubins from it. and
about being a satisfied year. — Mrs. Rieser I am
perfectly satisfied here for I do not bother any body's
business but my own, I live all to-gether to my self.
I do not have any thing to do with Charly Thomas
and he is my best friend it is all I can do to
look out for my self.
Me. and uncle Peter gets along a 2 right, although he
makes lots of bad mistakes that is he can not read
nor write therefore he has to guess at things which
should not be guessed at but certainty.
The rains made me let 3 a. of land go which I had
planted in cotton the weeds and coco out grew the
cotton I have not said a word about that and paid
my rent for 15 a just the same.
uncle Peter can't see that Mrs. Rieser. I would
like to stay here next year or as long as I can.
but the people all claim that a man and his
wife cannot work over 6 acres of cotton and are
liable to not make any thing at that price
Please let me know what to do for I would like
to start my plow as soon as I finish picking cotton.
I will work as much land as I can and I will
take a chain & take Uncle Peter and measure it
for him and pay you for every acre I work.

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Every body is afraid this year the boll weevil is very plentiful and done lots of damage this year to the cotton crop.
If I can work 15 acres I will do so, if I can work more I will do so.
Will be glad to know if my contract for the same is good. From your

Tenant and Servant

Wm H. Howe Col.

Page 4 of 4. MDAH Archives and Records Services.

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Copie
Isham Combs
to me.

Foote December 7th. 1910

Mrs Rieser New-York City

Madam.

This comes to inform you that I have this day carried one more tennant up to Mr. Wm. Percy to make contract for 25 more acres of land. Now Mrs Rieser the only trouble is about getting tennants over your place is, your cabins all need repairing, now if you let me get repairing lumber out that old Barn to repair the houses with, I can get enough lumber to do all the repairing without any trouble. Mr. Percy told me to write to you see if it would be satisfactory with you, for to get the lumber out the barn, to repair the houses with. I will repair the houses for the tennants my self and they will pay me for the same. Mrs. Rieser I am working faithfully to get your Place filled out with new tennants, I think I will fill it out if nothing happens. Now every body is settling, still not trying to get new tennants at all, every tennant agrees to do his own repairing, provided if you furnish the lumber Now please write back at once and let me know what to do

I remain your tennant
Isham Combs

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1379 Lexington Ave.
N.Y. Dec. 12/10

Mr. Wm Percy.
Greenville. Miss.

Sir

Although I have not had an answer to my letter about contracts and check I told of Charley Thomas. I am compelled to ask your advice again for I am at a loss how to answer another letter just received from Selem Combs, a copy of which please find enclosed. Now about this old barn, it is on the ground occupied by Charlie Thomas and although the contract I made with him last year only allows him the house and close house + 40 acres of land. I do not know if he is using the barn? or if I have the right to give Combs permission to use it for repairs.?

If it is not used I would be willing to let Selem Combs have it for repairs as he suggests, in order to get the balance of the place rented although your father advised me last year to rent for $5.00 pr. acre without repair which I did. I have written Combs to come and see you about it and would you kindly see what can be done, as he claims he can fill the place.

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Would you think it advisable to allow Cook or each new tenant who signs a contract a small amount of money for lumber to make required repair.
I leave that to you. If you think it advisable you might speak to Charley Thomas on the phone. ~~at Foote~~ c/o McLaw.
and notify him.
Some time very soon I will send you a small X'mas gift which I hope will give you as much pleasure as it does me in sending.
With best wishes to you and your parents from my daughter and self.

Very respectfully
(Mrs) J. Rieser

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January 9, 1911.

Willie Howe,

Foote, Miss:

Willie:-

In answer to your letter will say I gave the tenants permission to tear up one cabin which was in a dilapidated condition. I understand they have done this; that is about half of the cabin is torn down, and they still have the right to use the rest of it for repairing their houses.

If your cotton house is not the same building as the cabin they have been tearing down they have no right to use it and you can forbid them doing so.

Yours truly,

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January 17th, 1911.

Isham Coombs,

Foote, Miss.

Isham:-

The understanding about Mrs. Reiser's property is this: The tenants cannot select their land in spots, here and there but must take it in a block, all together. That is why I inquired of each tenant what house he was taking, and what land lay around the house. Each man is supposed to work the land lying around his house, and not to go around over the place selecting land here and there.

Furthermore, if any one on the place works more land than is called for under their rent note he must pay for the extra land $5.00 an acre. For instance: If a tenant has signed a rent note for 15 acres, 15 acres is the only amount of land he has a right to work, and if he takes more than that he must pay for it. Please instruct accordingly.

Mrs. Reiser has instructed you to measure off the land of the various tenants to see how much they have rented. You will do this, of course, according to instructions.

WAP/G

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January 21, 1911.

TO THE TENANTS ON MRS. REISER'S PLACE:

Last years tenants, under their rent notes, are to take and cultivate the same land that they cultivated last year, unless their contract calls for a less amount of land than they had last year. Of course if any tenant works more land than their rent notes call for, they will have to pay extra for that amount.

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February 2nd, 1911.

Isham Coombs,

Foote, Miss.

Isham:-

I am sending you all the contracts with the tenants on Mrs. Reiser's place, in duplicate, and signed by Mrs. Reiser. Please give these contracts to the various tenants, two copies going to each tenant. When they have signed both copies, let them return one of the copies to me and keep the other one,

Yours truly,

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March 31st, 1911.

Alec Davis,

Mrs. Reiser's Place,

Foote, Miss.

Dear Alec:-

Ishem Combs tells me that you are having some trouble with Charlie Thomas over 17 Acres of land, and that Charlie has been picking his land here and there over his place. The 17 Acres of land that Charlie has already broken up, he will have to take for this year, but you can select any 17 A on the place that is not now being cultivated by some of the other tenants.

Next year, we will come to a definite arrangement, and you shall have the preference of picking the land over Charlie Thomas. Charlie does not seem to have been protecting Mrs. Reiser's interest in the way he should.

I hope you will try to do the best you can.

Next year, we will have the whole matter straightened out, and you wont be the sufferer for it.

Yours truly,

WAP.

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March 31st, 1911.

Mrs. Johanna Reiser,
1379 Lexington Avenue,
New York City.

Dear Mrs. Reiser:-

I am enclosing you the rental contract signed by Frank Morris, I thing this is the last contract, which is due you. Ishem Combs was just in the office, giving me an account of certain trouble about the acreage that Chas. Thomas has been causing on the place. I think the matter is about straightened out. Of course, it is very difficult to tell who is lying and who is not, and my unfamiliarity with the land itself will possibly cause me to make mistakes, but we will have to let things rack along the best they can this year, and next year, in the light of this year's experience we can get things straighten out.

I think things are panning out alright for this year.

Yours truly,

WAP.

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C.C. MOODY. W.A. PERCY.
MOODY & PERCY,
ATTORNEYS AT LAW,
GREENVILLE, MISS.

November 14, 1911

Mr. S. I. Law,

Foote, Miss.

Dear Sir:

We beg to call your attention to the fact that Martha Howe still owes $10.00 rent to Mrs. Reiser. We understand that Martha has shipped all of her cotton to you, and for that reason give you this information, at the same time requesting you to let us have the $10.00. This amount is due on two acres of land worked by Martha which was not included in her rental contract.

Yours truly,

Moody & Percy

WAP

I forward this check to Citizen Bank as they sent a bill of it

Yours

S. I. Law

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NAME _____ DATE _____

The Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance

Directions: After reading the two poems by Langston Hughes and the *Percy Family Papers*, answer the following questions.

1. Explain the general social, political, and economic conditions in the Mississippi Delta during the early 1900s.

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2. Describe the relationship between the southern white landowner and the African American tenant farmers.

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3. Give two or three possible solutions for tenant farmers who have become part of the sharecroppers' system.

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_____

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The Most Southern Place on Earth Excerpt

By the 1930s the Mississippi Delta's distinctive economic and cultural identity had attracted the attention of observers well beyond the boundaries of Mississippi. In 1935, for example, Rupert Vance identified the "cotton obsessed, Negro obsessed" Delta as "the deepest South," a region where one found "the highest economic range the South, with its peculiar social organization of black and white, may be expected to attain without industrialization." To Vance, however, the Delta was above all a land of contrasts. He was struck by both the "mansions" and the manners of the region's planter aristocracy — "affable and courteous with equals, commanding and forceful with inferiors" — but he noted as well that in the Delta the "Negro" was "to be found at his lowest level in America."

The Delta Vance described was indeed a region where extremes of white affluence and privilege were sustained by equally striking levels of black deprivation and powerlessness. The ability of the Delta's white minority to subjugate and exploit its black majority depended in large part on a system of caste-based social control that was rigid, pervasive, and self-perpetuating. Only if members of both races played their well-defined caste roles with inerrant consistency and an almost exaggerated vigor could white dominance of such a racially and economically imbalanced society be maintained.

James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York: Oxford Universtiy Press, 1992), 153.

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NAME _____ DATE _____

Four Squares Writing Graphic Organizer

Directions: Follow the instructions in the chart below to complete individual research on Jim Crow laws, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Great Migration via the Internet or other teacher approved resources. Then, on the blank chart, explain the peculiar social organization of African Americans and whites in the Mississippi Delta and the caste system that defined the Delta's plantation-based economy using the chart below.

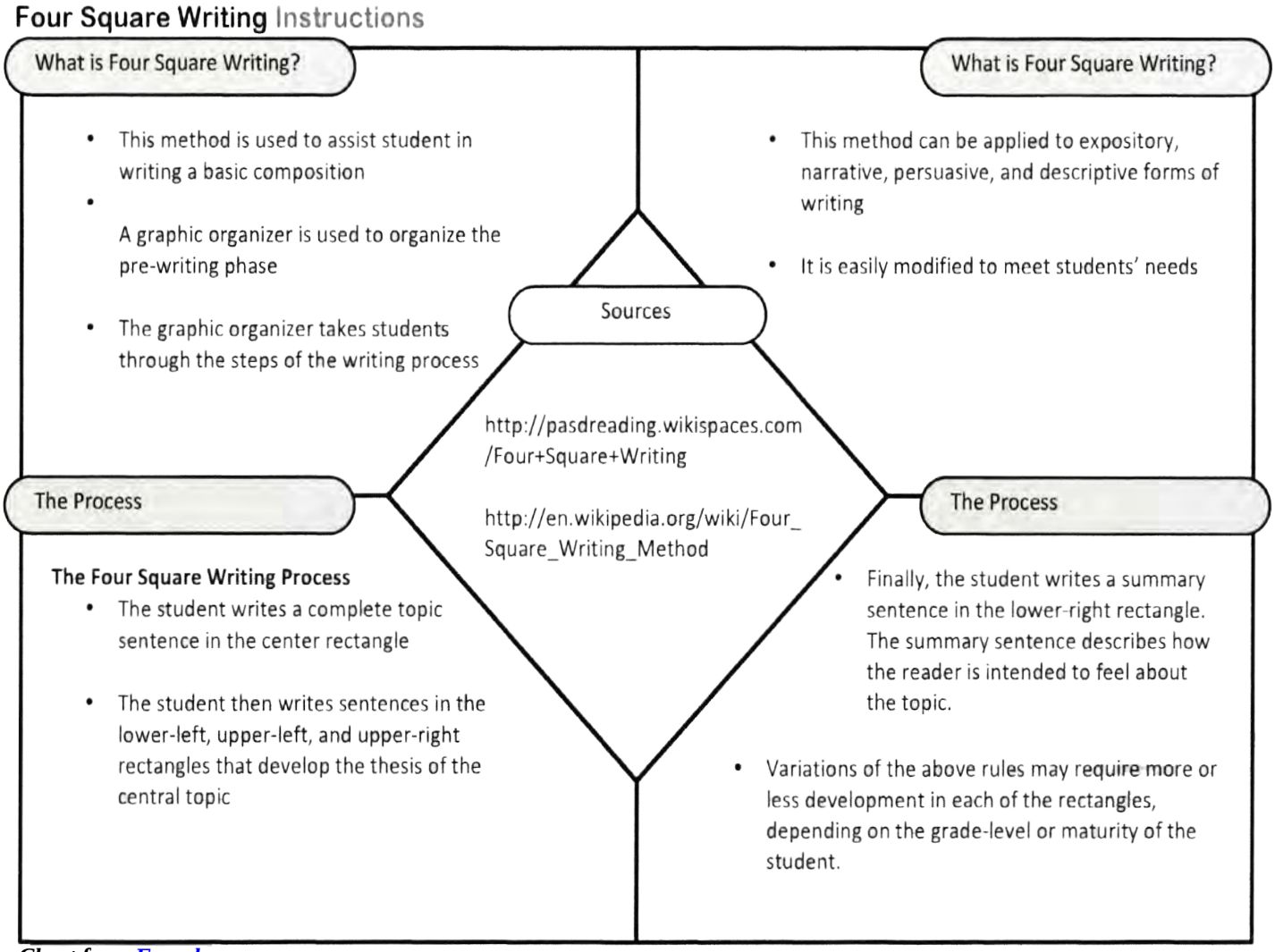

Chart from Freeology.com.

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NAME _____ DATE _____

Four Square Writing

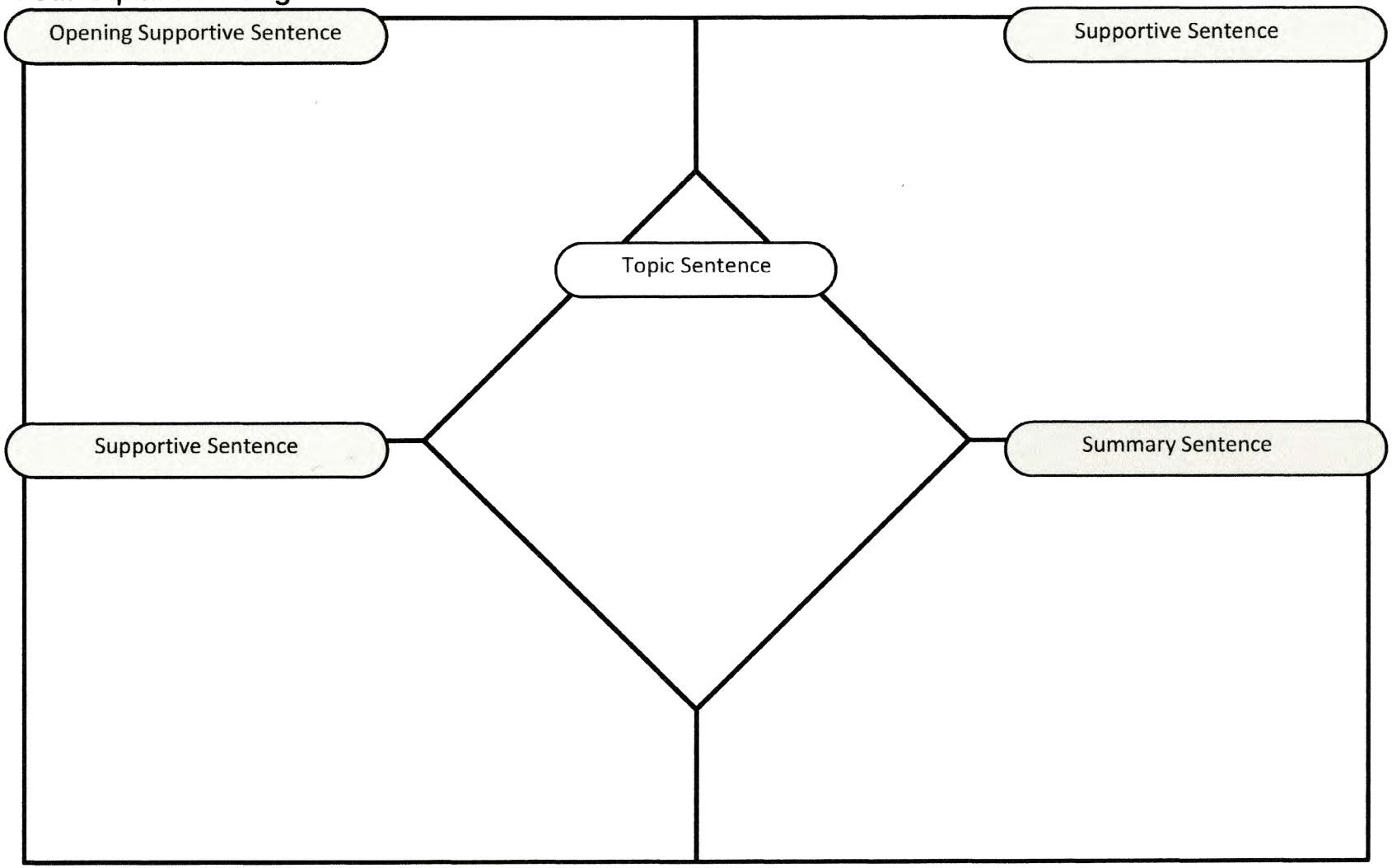

Chart from Freeology.com.

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From the Cotton Fields to the Blues

The North was viewed as the promised land, an idea perpetuated by the need for factory workers and the fact that pay in such factories was typically as much as three times more than what African Americans made working the land in the South. While segregation was not legalized in the North as it was in the South, African Americans experienced prejudice and racism in the North, commonly known as "de facto segregation." Life in the North presented its own challenges for African Americans, including poor living conditions and harsh, often dangerous, work environments. The blues represents a concrete study of the Great Migration, both in terms of blues musicians who made the move from South to North and with respect to the music these musicians created. The connection between the blues and the Great Migration is illustrated by the blues songs "Times Is Getting Harder" written by Lucious Curtis and "Back Water Blues" written by Big Bill Broonzy.

Lucious Curtis was a renowned guitar player and blues singer. He is famous for many of his Mississippi blues recordings and was a long-time collaborator with Willie Ford, another well known blues singer. Though Curtis is noted for his many talents, Big Bill Broonzy is more well known. He was born in the Mississippi Delta and became one of the most important Chicago blues artists in the 1930s and early 1940s (prior to the period of "Chicago Blues" represented by Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon, Little Walter, and Howlin' Wolf). Not only did he record frequently under his own name, he also accompanied numerous other artists on their recordings, and he acted as a talent scout for record companies. In the 1950s, he was one of the first to bring the blues to European audiences. Several of his recordings reflected the push-pull factors that encouraged African Americans to leave the South. The song "Back Water Blues" related the story of the 1927 flood which served as a major reason for African Americans to leave the Delta.

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“Times Is Getting Harder” *by Lucious Curtis*

Times is gettin’ harder,

Money’s getting’ scarce.

Soon as I gather my cotton and corn,

I’m bound to leave this place.

White folks sittin’ in the parlor,

Eatin’ that cake and cream,

N*****’s way down in the kitchen,

Squabblin’ over turnip greens.

Times is gettin’ harder,

Money’s getting’ scarce.

Soon as I gather my cotton and corn,

I’m bound to leave this place.

Me and my brother was out.

Thought we’d have some fun.

He stole three chickens.

We began to run.

Times is gettin’ harder,

Money’s gettin scarce.

Soon as I gather my cotton and corn

I’m bound to leave this place.

Lucious Curtis, “Times Is Getting Harder” from *Mississippi River Blues-Vol. I*, Matchbox Label reissue (1940). http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5333/ (accessed September 2, 2015).

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“Back Water Blues” *by Big Bill Broonzy*

It rained five days, Lord and the clouds turned as dark as night

It rained five days, and the clouds turned as dark as night

Lord, that was really enough trouble to make a poor man, wonder where in the world to go

I got up one mornin’, poor me I couldn’t get even get out of my door

I got up one mornin’, poor me I couldn’t get even get out of my door

Lord, that was really enough trouble to make a poor man, wonder where in the world to go

Now they rowed a little boat, just about five miles across the farm

Yeah, they rowed a little boat, down about five miles across the farm

Lord, I packed up all of my clothes and throwed them in,

And I declare they rowed poor old Bill along

Then I went and I stood up on a high, high old lonesome hill

Yes, I went and I stood up on a high, high old lonesome hill

Lord, and all I could do was look down on the house, baby where I used to live

Now it thundered and it lightnin’d, Lord and the wind, wind began to blow

Now it thundered and it lightnin’d, Lord and the wind, wind began to blow

Lord, there was thousands and thousands of poor people,

At that time didn’t have no place to go

Big Bill Broonzy, “Back Water Blues” https://www.flashlyrics.com/lyrics/big-bill-broonzy/back-water-blues-54 (accessed September 2, 2015).

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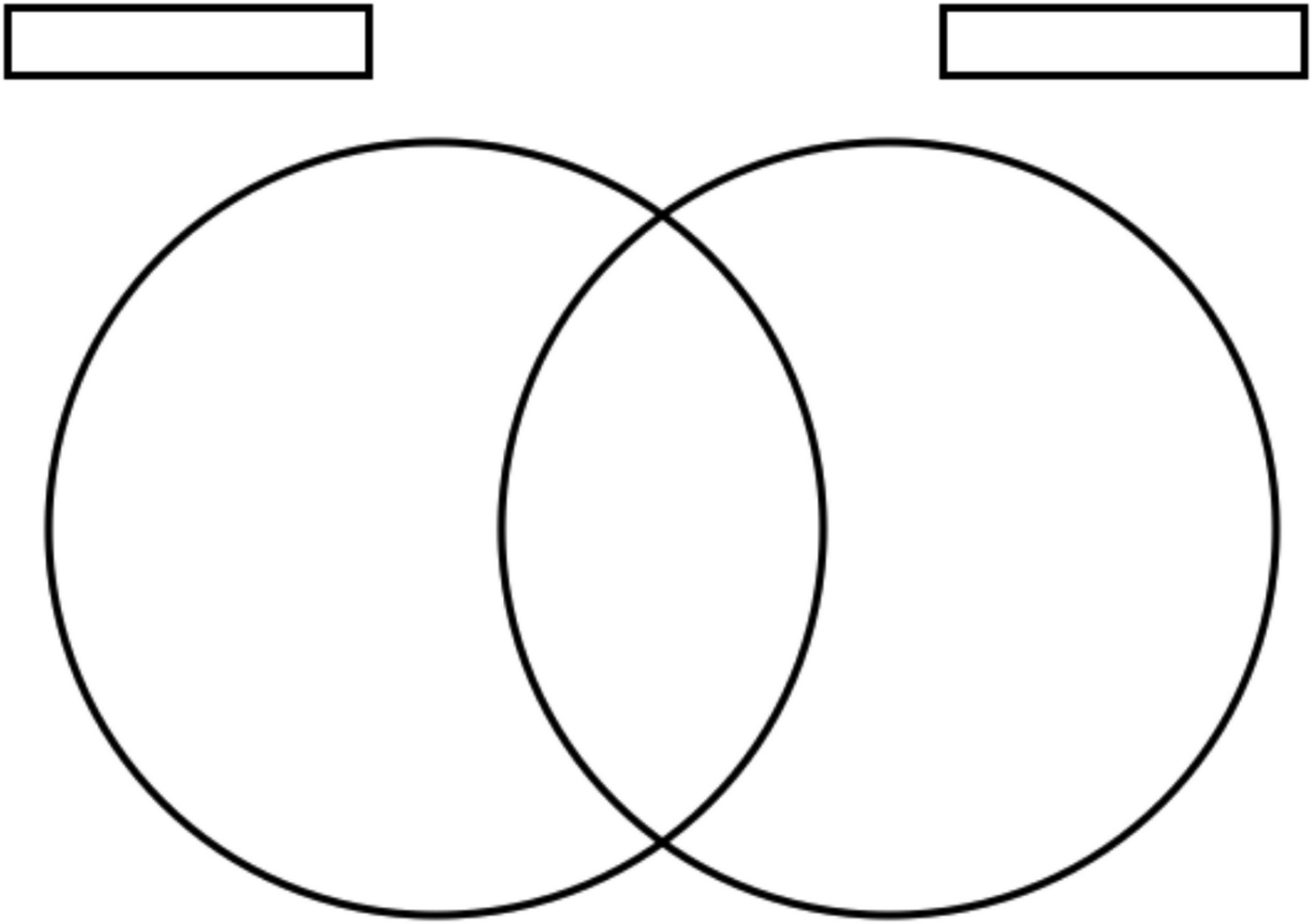
NAME _____ DATE _____

Venn Diagram

Directions: After reading the lyrics to the two blues songs, use the diagram below to compare them and explain how bluesmen used a historical event like the Great Migration to highlight the lives of common people who left the South.



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MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY LESSON PLANS

TEACHER EVALUATION

COMPLETE BOTH SIDES AND PLEASE MAIL OR FAX TO THE ADDRESS ON THE NEXT PAGE. THANK YOU!

TEACHER NAME _____

SCHOOL NAME & ADDRESS _____

_____

EMAIL *(OPTIONAL)* _____

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS_____ **GRADE LEVEL** _____

LESSON TITLE ***The Great Migration Converges with Poetry and the Blues*** _____

1. In your opinion, did this unit elicit better than average student response; if so, how?

2. Which segments of the unit exceeded your students' attention span?

3. Will this unit be of assistance to you in developing future classroom activities; if so, how?

4. How did this unit add to your earlier teaching on the same subject?

5. Would this teaching unit be handier to use as a:
   ___multi-day unit ___multi-week unit ___other

6. Were the activities and lessons appropriate for your students? How?

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Please rate the following lesson materials and activities by circling the appropriate number.

4=excellent, **3**=good, **2**=average, **1**=inadequate

Directions and Notes	4	3	2	1
Curricular Connections	4	3	2	1
Student Worksheets	4	3	2	1
Interactive Activities	4	3	2	1
Historic Images	4	3	2	1
References and Resources	4	3	2	1

Activity One: The Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance	4	3	2	1
Activity Two: Jim Crow in the Delta	4	3	2	1
Activity Three: From the Cotton Fields to the Blues	4	3	2	1
Extension Activities	4	3	2	1
Overall Unit	4	3	2	1

We would appreciate any additional comments on this teaching unit and any suggestions for improvement. Comments may be entered in the space below.

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