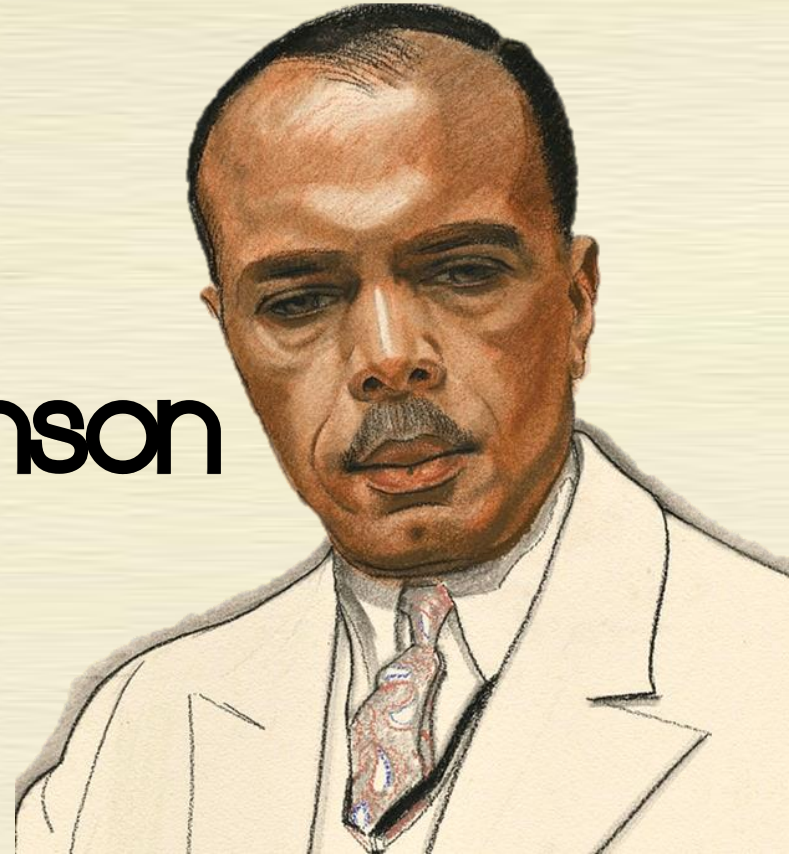


author focus:

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

with **Jim Soto**



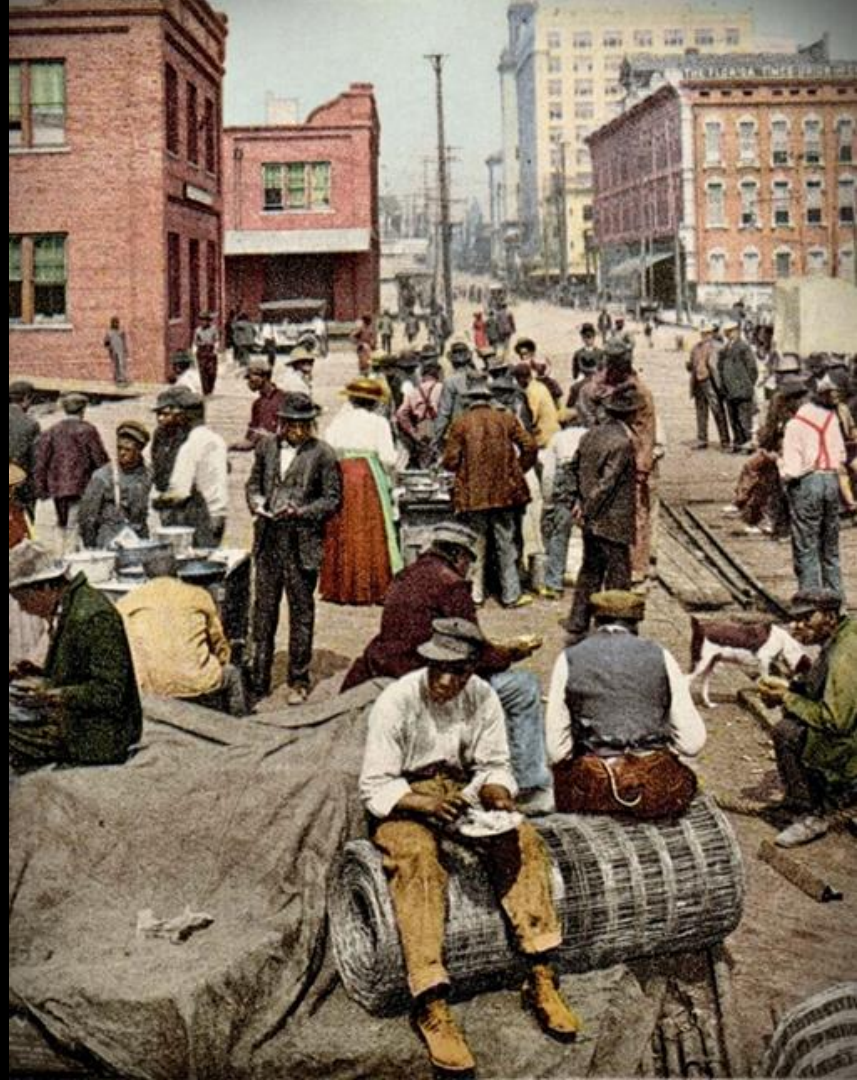
SPEAK YOUR MIND

If you moved to a new city or country, what would you miss most about where you live now? Why?

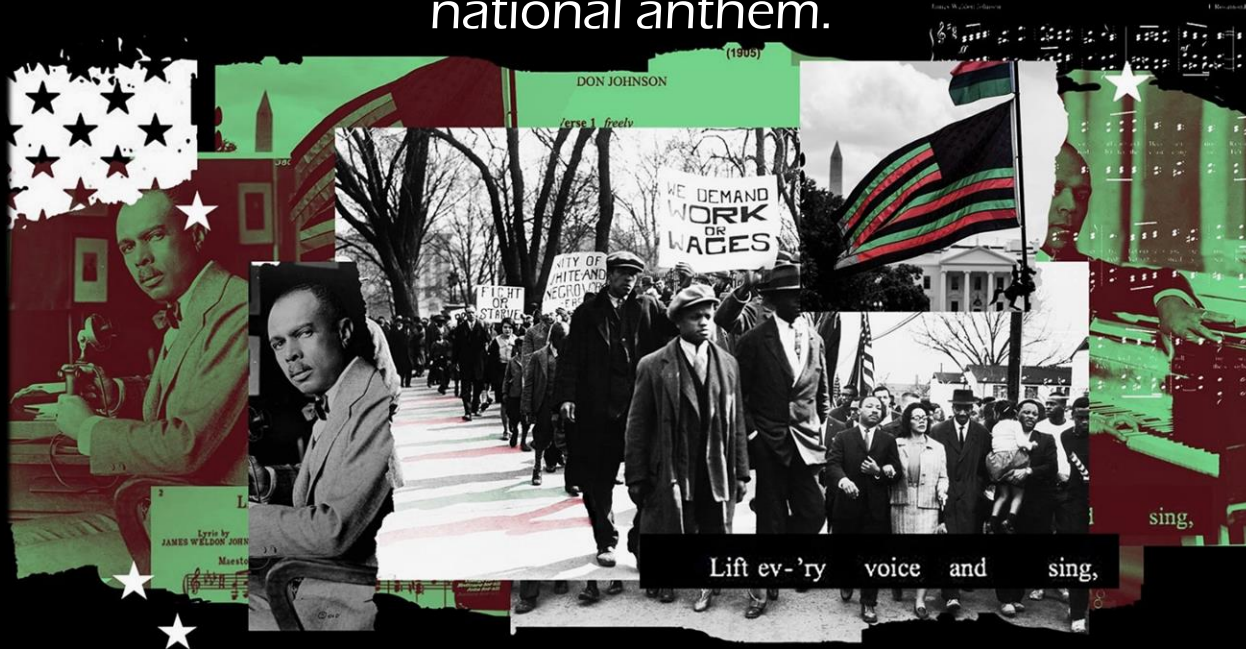
Take a minute to consider, answer and explain the question in your notebook.



James Weldon Johnson (JWJ) was born in 1871 in Jacksonville, FL, in the early years of the Reconstruction Era. Because Jacksonville did not have a high school for African Americans, Johnson moved to Atlanta, where he later graduated from college. He then returned to Jacksonville and became a school principal. He later studied law and became the first African American to be admitted to the Florida bar.

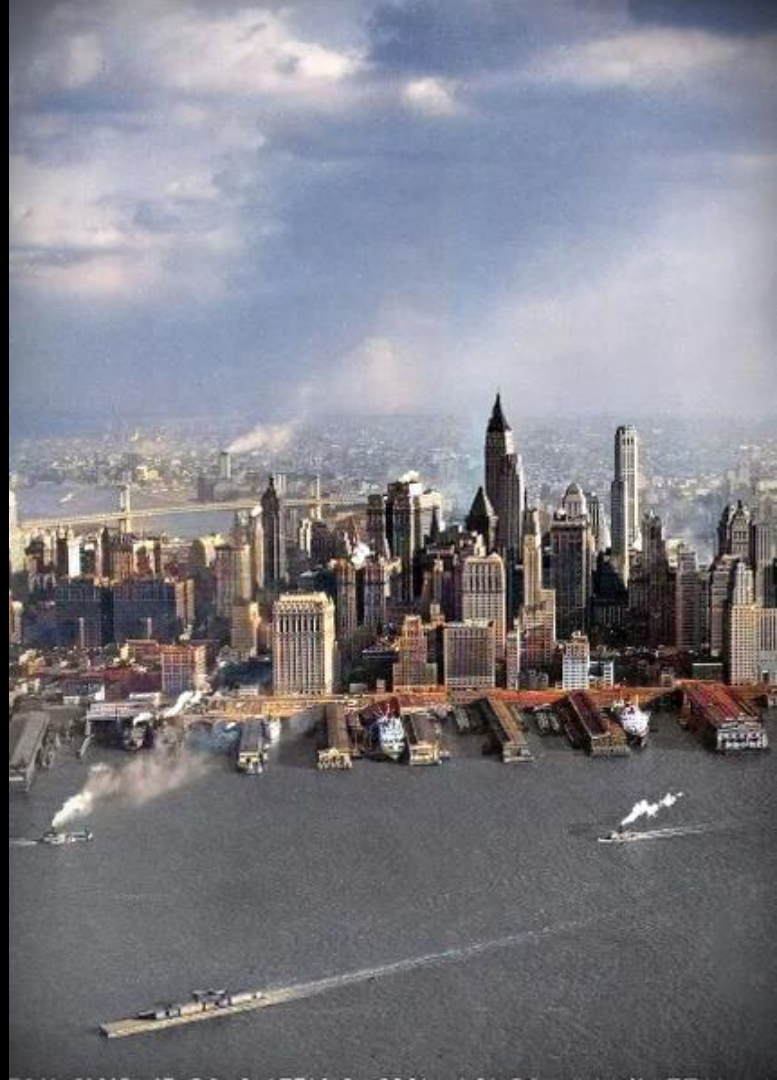


A key figure of the Harlem Renaissance, J.W.J. had many talents. Not only was he a distinguished lawyer and diplomat, also serving as executive secretary at NAACP, he was also a writer, poet and composer who wrote the song "Lift Every Voice and Sing," known as the Black national anthem.



MY CITY

JWJ spent much of his life in New York City, finally settling there. His poem “My City,” published in 1935, is an ode to Manhattan, one of the five boroughs of New York. “My City” uses strong language to give readers a vivid portrait of the city. It’s also a meditation on death. Using the form of a Petrarchan sonnet, Johnson asks in the first stanza what will be his greatest loss upon dying; he answers that question in the second one.



GO DOWN, DEATH

Published in 1927, is written in free verse and was inspired by the artistry of the classic African-American sermon. In the poem, the preacher asks mourners not to weep at the loss of Sister Caroline, because dying has ended her suffering. Death is personified in this poem as a merciful agent of God who has relieved her of pain and brought her “home.”





from **BLACK MANHATTAN**

Johnson's *Black Manhattan* is a history of African Americans in New York City, beginning in the 17th century when the Dutch founded New Amsterdam. At that time, according to Johnson, only eleven African Americans (all male) lived there. In describing slavery, abolition, and lynchings, JWJ points to the collective will of the Black community to resist oppression and develop a culture that would help shape the wider American culture.

watches would
watch
which
witch watching

LITERARY ELEMENTS

Alliteration

Refers to the repetition of consonant sounds. Although alliteration usually refers to sounds at the beginning of words, it also can be used to refer to sounds within words.

The poems "My City" and "Go Down, Death" show Johnson's range as a writer. "My City" follows the traditional form of a Petrarchan sonnet, and "Go Down, Death" is written in free verse to emulate an African-American sermon. Despite these differences in form, both poems contain alliteration. Write down examples of repeated consonant sounds as you read. In reading "Go Down, Death," also look for examples of repetition.

ASSESSMENT

After reading pages 437-445 in your book, complete the activities:

1. REFER TO TEXT &
2. REASON WITH TEXT
3. & ANALYZE LITERATURE
 - **Alliteration and Repetition** - What instances of alliteration did you find in each poem? How does the use of alliteration help create the tone of each poem?
 - List the words and phrases that are repeated in "Go Down, Death." Why does Johnson repeat these particular words and phrases? If this poem were read at a funeral, how might the repetition affect the listeners?



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