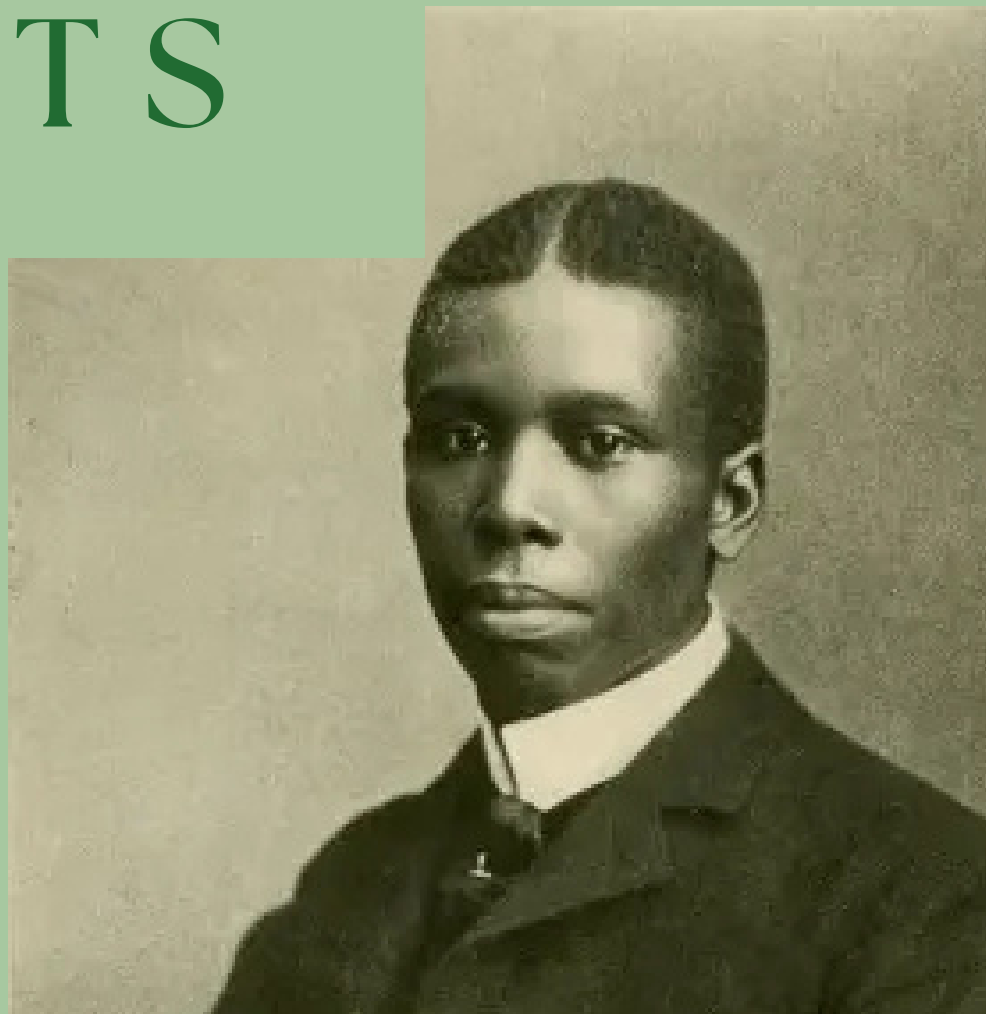




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G R E A T
B L A C K
P O E T S





Joyce Carol Thomas (1938–2016) was an acclaimed African American author, poet, and playwright. She is best known for her contributions to children’s and young adult literature, often focusing on African American experiences, cultural heritage, and themes of resilience and identity. Her novel *Marked by Fire* won the National Book Award for Children’s Books in 1983, and her poetic language and storytelling are celebrated for their richness and depth. Thomas’s work often explores themes of family, community, and personal growth, reflecting her rural Oklahoma upbringing and African American heritage.

Questions:

1. How did Joyce Carol Thomas’s upbringing in rural Oklahoma influence her storytelling and themes in her writing?
2. What cultural and historical themes are commonly explored in her works, such as *Marked by Fire*?
3. How did Joyce Carol Thomas use poetry to celebrate African American heritage and identity?
4. What impact did winning the National Book Award have on her career and recognition as a writer?
5. How do her plays and other writings contribute to the broader understanding of African American experiences?



Countee Cullen (1903–1946) was a prominent poet, novelist, and playwright of the Harlem Renaissance. Known for his lyrical style and exploration of themes such as race, identity, and spirituality, Cullen combined classical poetic forms with contemporary subjects. His poetry often grappled with the challenges of being Black in America while also expressing universal human emotions. Works like *Color* (1925) and poems like “Incident” highlight the complexities of racial discrimination. Cullen was also known for his advocacy for artistic freedom, believing that Black artists should not be confined to addressing only racial issues.

Questions:

1. How did Countee Cullen’s classical poetic style influence his contributions to the Harlem Renaissance?
2. What themes in Cullen’s poetry, such as “Incident,” reflect the racial realities of his time?
3. How did Cullen balance themes of race and universal human experiences in his works?
4. What role did spirituality play in shaping Cullen’s perspective as a poet?
5. How did Countee Cullen’s beliefs about artistic freedom challenge expectations of Black artists during the Harlem Renaissance?



Alice Dunbar Nelson (1875–1935) was an influential African American poet, journalist, and activist during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Born in New Orleans, she was of mixed racial heritage and part of the Creole community. Alice was also the wife of black poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar. Her writings explored themes of race, and social justice, often highlighting the complexities of identity and the struggles of African Americans. In addition to her literary work, she was deeply involved in civil rights and women’s suffrage movements. Her notable works include *Violets and Other Tales* (1895) and numerous essays and short stories. Nelson was also a strong advocate for equality, using her platform to address issues of racial and gender inequality.

Questions:

1. How did Alice Dunbar Nelson’s Creole heritage influence her writing and themes?
2. What themes are explored in her book *Violets and Other Tales*, and how do they reflect her views on race and gender?
3. How did Nelson balance her roles as a writer, journalist, and activist in advancing social justice?
4. What contributions did Nelson make to the women’s suffrage and civil rights movements?
5. How did Nelson’s personal experiences shape her exploration of identity and inequality in her work?



Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906) was a pioneering African American poet, novelist, and playwright. Born in Dayton, Ohio, to formerly enslaved parents, he became one of the first Black writers to gain national and international fame. His work often explored themes of love, race, identity, and resilience, employing both standard English and African American dialect to convey the depth of the Black experience. Dunbar's poem about his wife Alice reflects his mastery of romantic and lyrical poetry. The poem is a heartfelt expression of love and admiration for Alice, describing her beauty and the emotional impact she has on the speaker. Through vivid imagery and rhythmic language, Dunbar captures the intensity of affection, showcasing his ability to evoke deep emotion with simplicity and elegance. Despite his short life, Dunbar's work, including poems like Alice, remains a significant part of African American literary heritage, celebrated for its artistry and cultural importance.

Questions:

1. Who was Paul Laurence Dunbar, and why is he significant in American literary history?
2. What themes are commonly found in Dunbar's works, and how do they reflect his experiences?
3. How does the poem Alice showcase Dunbar's skill in expressing emotion through poetry?
4. What literary techniques does Dunbar use in Alice to convey the speaker's feelings?
5. Why is Paul Laurence Dunbar considered a trailblazer for African American writers?



Ann Spencer (1882-1975) was an influential African American poet, civil rights activist, and educator from Lynchburg, Virginia. She was the first African American woman to have her poetry published in the Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry. Known for her vivid imagery and themes of racial equality, she was connected to the Harlem Renaissance and maintained friendships with prominent figures like Langston Hughes and W.E.B. Du Bois. Her home, now a historical landmark, served as a meeting place for leaders and activists in the fight for civil rights. Today, it remains preserved as a museum, offering a glimpse into her life and contributions to literature and civil rights.

Questions:

1. What made Ann Spencer's poetry notable in American literature?
2. How was Ann Spencer connected to the Harlem Renaissance?
3. Which prominent civil rights leaders did Ann Spencer befriend?
4. What role did Ann Spencer's home play in her community?
5. Why is Ann Spencer's home preserved as a historical landmark today?