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# The Making of a Poet and a People. Learning American History at Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial: Grade 9 (10) Field Trip Model

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**LEARNING AMERICAN HISTORY AT  
PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR STATE MEMORIAL:  
GRADE 9 (10) FIELD TRIP MODEL**

**By- Timothy Binkley**

*Lesson Title:* “The Making of a Poet and a People”

*Time Allotment:* 90 minutes total: 10 minutes for the welcome and introduction and 40 minutes each in the Visitors’ Center exhibits and the Dunbar House.

*Overview:* At the Dunbar State Memorial, students will be introduced to the life and career of poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. While half of the class visits the home under the supervision of an OHS docent / guide and at least one other adult, the other half takes the following Welcome Center tour. (45 minutes later, the two groups will switch places.)

During the Welcome Center tour, several important indicator-related concepts are to be brought out:

1. The migration of Dunbar’s parents from the South (slavery) to the North (skilled labor), and from the farm (South) to the city (North);
2. Paul working as a child to help the family raise money;
3. The emergence of a middle class having more time for leisure and creating a market for popular literature and live entertainment, hence Paul’s career.

*Standard(s):* History Benchmark B: “Explain the social, political and economic effects of industrialization.” (p.29)

*Indicator(s) Addressed:* Grade-Level indicator for Grade Ten, *Industrialization*: “1. Explain the effects of industrialization in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century including:  
b. Immigration and child labor and their impact on the labor force;  
d. Urbanization;  
e. The emergence of a middle class and its impact on leisure, art, music, literature and other aspects of culture.” (p.52)

*Preparations for Teachers:* Please view the following websites in preparation: <http://www.ohiohistory.org/places/dunbar/index.html> <http://www.coax.net/people/LWF/dunbar.htm>  
[http://www.nps.gov/daav/cul\\_paullaurencedunbar.htm](http://www.nps.gov/daav/cul_paullaurencedunbar.htm)  
[http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a\\_f/dunbar/dunbar.htm](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/dunbar/dunbar.htm)

For an excellent assessment of Dunbar’s poetry and its place in American literary history, see James Weldon Johnson’s article: “The Negro’s Creative Genius.” It can be found online at [http://www.boondocksnet.com/editions/anp/anp001\\_e.html](http://www.boondocksnet.com/editions/anp/anp001_e.html)

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Here is a bibliography of readings recommended by Wright State University for the study of Paul Laurence Dunbar

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(source: <http://www.libraries.wright.edu/dunbar/index.html#oak26> )

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Brawley, Benjamin Griffith. *Paul Laurence Dunbar, Poet of His People*. Kennicat Press, 1967.

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar; with the introduction by W.D. Howells to Lyrics of Lowly Life*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1918.

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. *Paul Laurence Dunbar Papers at the Ohio Historical Society, Columbus. Microform*. Columbus, Ohio: Archives and Manuscripts Division, Ohio Historical Society, 1972.

Hudson, Harold Gossie. *A Biography of Paul Laurence Dunbar*. Thesis. Ohio State University, 1970.

Metcalf, E.W. *Paul Laurence Dunbar, A Bibliography*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975.

Wiggins, Lida Keck. *The Life and Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar: containing his complete poetical works, his best short stories, numerous anecdotes and a complete biography of the famous poet*. Nashville, Tenn.: Winston-Derek Publishers, 1992.

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It is worth noting that the Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial has produced its own teaching guides / lesson plans. Call 937-224-7061 to inquire about their availability.

REMEMBER TO MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS WELL IN ADVANCE. Please call the Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial (937-224-7061) to schedule your visit.

*Media Resources:* Dunbar House Ohio Historical Society pamphlet "Writer" (available online at <http://www.coax.net/people/LWF/dunbar.htm> ), exhibit panels in the Dunbar House State Memorial Visitor's Center, and the Dunbar House itself.

## PRE-FIELD TRIP INTRODUCTIONS

Before taking this field trip: Tell students that they will be expected to take notes during the field trip. Therefore, they will need to take paper or writing pads and a pen or pencil with them.

**A. Read a book!** The following book is recommended student reading:  
*Paul Laurence Dunbar: Portrait of a Poet*, by Catherine Reef. (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2000). [ISBN 0-7660-1350-2]

**B. A Paul Laurence Dunbar Slide Show**

Begin by activating and projecting this hyperlink [www.nps.gov/daav/media/pdf/way\\_WDIC\\_makingHisWayWords.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/daav/media/pdf/way_WDIC_makingHisWayWords.pdf)  
*[or passing around a large, laminated copy of this National Park Service poster]*  
and giving the following introduction:

Paul Laurence Dunbar, one of America's great poets, was born in Dayton, Ohio on June 27, 1872. He died here in his mother's home on February 9, 1906. Though tuberculosis took his life at a young age, it could not silence him. The words that he wrote are still remembered, and his concerns about social justice, acceptance and respect for African Americans are also still very much alive today.

The Dayton Metro Library system has constructed an internet slide show on the life of Paul Laurence Dunbar. Let's view it together as a class.

(Activate hyperlink [home.dayton.lib.oh.us/Archives/Dunbar/ExhPaulDunbar1.html](http://home.dayton.lib.oh.us/Archives/Dunbar/ExhPaulDunbar1.html). Click on "Next Page" to advance through the slide show. Click on photos to enlarge them.)

**C. View Paul Laurence Dunbar Video Excerpts**

**The Dayton Metro Library has several copies of the videotaped production, "Paul Laurence Dunbar: The Eyes of the Poet" available for use. (Catalogue no. Video 811 D898P) This is an excellent local production. However, for classroom use I would suggest selecting a few excerpts rather than showing the entire program.**

**D. Trip Introduction Using the Internet**

Paul Laurence Dunbar, one of America's great poets, was born in Dayton, Ohio on June 27, 1872. He died here in his mother's home on February 9, 1906. Though tuberculosis took his life at a young age, it could not silence him. The words that he wrote are still remembered, and his concerns about social justice, acceptance and respect for African Americans are also still very much alive today. [http://www.nps.gov/daav/media/pdf/way\\_WDIC\\_makingHisWayWords.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/daav/media/pdf/way_WDIC_makingHisWayWords.pdf)

[Today / Tomorrow] we will be visiting the Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial. <http://www.ohiohistory.org/places/dunbar/index.html>

Does anyone remember visiting the Dunbar Memorial? If you have not been there lately, you have missed a great deal. Since 1992, it has been one of the partner sites of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park. [http://www.nps.gov/daav/cul\\_paullaurencedunbar.htm](http://www.nps.gov/daav/cul_paullaurencedunbar.htm)

<http://www.state.oh.us/afc/project.asp?proj=dunbar>

In recent years, the Ohio Historical Society renovated the home and other buildings on the site. So, even if you have visited before, things are not the same as they were. Get ready to see and learn some new things!

### **E. Reading and Group Processing Questions**

To make sure we are well acquainted with Paul Laurence Dunbar's life, career and legacy, let's all read an essay written by the Director of the Dunbar Memorial, Ms LaVerne Sci:

<http://www.coax.net/people/LWF/dunbar.htm>.

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**HANDOUT** Working in teams of three, answer the following questions from information located on this web site: <http://www.coax.net/people/LWF/dunbar.htm>

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1. What was Paul's mother's name?
  2. What was Paul's father's name?
  3. Which of the following most accurately represents Paul Laurence Dunbar's tie to slavery? (a) His father had been a slave. (b) His mother had been a slave. (c) Both his parents had been enslaved. (d) Paul was born into slavery.
  4. At what age did Paul write his first poem?
  5. At what age did he give his first public recitation?
  6. In addition to Paul Laurence Dunbar, how many African Americans were in his class at Central High School?
  7. Name three of Paul Laurence Dunbar's high school honors or achievements.
  8. Where and when did Mr. Dunbar first meet Frederick Douglas?
  9. What was the title of Paul's first published book?
  10. How old was Paul when his first book was published?
  11. What was his main job at the time?
  12. What literary critic brought Paul Laurence Dunbar national acclaim?
  13. Where was Paul employed in Washington, D.C.?
  14. Who did Paul Laurence Dunbar marry?
  15. What United States president gave Paul Laurence Dunbar a ceremonial sword?
  16. What United States president invited Mr. Dunbar to ride in his inauguration parade?
  17. By how many years did Paul's mother outlive him?
  18. List four kinds of literary works Paul wrote and published during his career.
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VOCABULARY LIST for the Essay by LaVerne Sci

Luminaries - persons of prominence or brilliant achievement

Prestigious - honored

Compensation – pay; recompense

Tedious - tiresome because of length or dullness: boring

Tuberculosis - a highly contagious disease of humans and some other vertebrates caused by the tubercle bacillus and characterized by toxic symptoms or allergic manifestations which in humans primarily affect the lungs

Dialect - a regional variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation from other regional varieties, or a variety of language whose identity is fixed by a factor other than geography (as social class) <spoke a rough peasant *dialect*>

Succumb - to be brought to an end (as death) by the effect of destructive or disruptive forces

Answer Key to the above reading and group processing assignment:

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- 1) Matilda
  - 2) Joshua
  - 3) C. Both his parents had been enslaved.
  - 4) 6 years old
  - 5) 9 years old
  - 6) 0 other students
  - 7) He joined the debate team, was elected President of the literary Society and became Editor of the school newspaper
  - 8) 1893 World's Fair
  - 9) *Oak and Ivy*
  - 10) 20 years old
  - 11) Elevator operator
  - 12) William Dean Howells
  - 13) The Library of Congress
  - 14) Alice Ruth Moore
  - 15) Theodore Roosevelt
  - 16) William McKinley
  - 17) 1906-1934 = 28 years
  - 18) Poems, novels, short stories and song lyrics
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## ON-SITE TOUR

Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)

Students arrive and assemble on (or by) the front porch of the Dunbar House. When assembled (and quiet), a docent / guide from OHS (or teacher, if OHS staff is not available to do this) greets the students with a reading of the poem:

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### **Life.**

A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in,  
A minute to smile and an hour to weep in,  
A pint of joy to a peck of trouble,  
And never a laugh but the moans come double;  
And that is life!

A crust and a corner that love makes precious,  
With the smile to warm and the tears to refresh us;  
And joy seems sweeter when cares come after,  
And a moan is the finest of foils for laughter;  
And that is life!

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Source: Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Oak and Ivy* (Dayton, OH: United Brethren Publishing House, 1893). <http://www.libraries.wright.edu/dunbar/oak&ivy1.html#index36>

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A general welcome follows, with some brief remarks orienting the students to the property. Next, state these guidelines for visiting.

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We ask you to:

- Stay with your group at all times;
- Listen carefully to the guide and teacher;
- Ask questions as you go;
- Respect other visitors who are here to enjoy the park;
- Respect the property by not littering, by staying on approved paths and by not touching artifacts unless invited to do so.

Divide the class into two groups. While half of the class goes in to visit the home directly, the other half is guided through the Visitor Center background exhibits, starting in the entryway hall. Each group needs an Ohio Historical Society docent / guide and teacher or parent. If possible, have one adult present for each 8-10 students. After 45 minutes, the two groups will change place.

Make sure that students have pencils and paper along to take notes on what they see and heard on the tours.

- A. The house tour will be conducted by the OHS docent / guide, in accordance with OHS tour group lesson plans. Extra adult(s) will support the docent / guide and help engage the students.
- B. A Visitor Center tour is outlined in detail below. This tour is to be guided either by the teacher or by an OHS docent / guide.

In the entryway, direct the students' attention to the exhibit panels:

- "Dunbar's Childhood"
- "Growing Up in Dayton"

Begin reading the text aloud. Ask different students to take turns reading a paragraph aloud (for the benefit of those who may not be standing close in enough to read it for themselves.) Discuss Dunbar's early family life, stressing his parents' struggles to leave slavery and their struggles to earn a living in Dayton.

Brainstorm with the students how life in the rural, agricultural South would have been different from life in the urban, industrial North. Was life in Dayton everything they had hoped it would be? Have any of your students moved from the country to the city or from the city to the country? Was that a difficult transition for their families?

Explore the concept of child labor: children helping their families raise money to live on. How did Paul and his half-brothers help to support their family? Ask if any of your students work to raise money, and if so, what they do... Or what they might do if their family needed them to work (e.g. baby sit, mow lawns, sell crafts, baked goods, etc.) Explain that child labor is less common (and more highly regulated) in the United States today.

Move on to the next panels:

- "An Early Career as a Poet"
- "Dunbar's Waning Years"

Discuss any questions raised by these exhibit panels.

Move to the other side of the entryway, noting the recital programs decorating the hall.

Then review the summary panel:

- "The Legacy of Paul Laurence Dunbar"

Note Paul's published output: 4 novels, 4 books of short stories, 12 books of poetry, 24 songs, operetta and musicals [plus items published in various newspapers and magazines]. All this was produced within a short amount of time, approximately 14 years. During some of these years, his health was failing, and his output reduced. Still, he was a very prolific writer who loved what he did. Imagine what else he could have accomplished had he lived another 14, 28 or 42 years. Would the African-American community have been different if he had continued to write? Would the United States have been different?

Note that in addition to writing, Paul also performed his works. He was popular as a speaker both in the United States and in Europe. Enter the adjacent room ("Paul Laurence Dunbar: The Man, His Times, and His Legacy" exhibit). Note the bicycle given to him by

the Wright Brothers, the artifacts from his world travels, his fancy dress clothes for public appearances, and the poem “Seedling.” Are there any students who want to try reading this poem aloud, as Paul Dunbar did? Give students a chance to do so.

Move into the next room. Note the books by P. L. Dunbar on display. Let the student look at these items and the items in the next room briefly before they move on to view the Dunbar House [Group A].

*[Group B, which toured the house first, may want to take some time to review how what they saw in the home reflects what they now know about Paul Laurence Dunbar and family.]*

End the site visit with all students assembled (perhaps near the front porch, where the tours began) for a reading of one (or both) of the following poems:

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**Dunbar**  
By Anne Spencer

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Ah, how poets sing and die!

Make one song and Heaven takes it;

Have one heart and Beauty breaks it;

Chatterton, Shelley, Keats and I—

Ah, how poets sing and die!

Source: Johnson, James Weldon, ed. *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt,

Brace and Company, 1922; BoondocksNet Edition, 2001).

<http://www.boondocksnet.com/editions/anp/anp102.html>

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**PAULLAURENCE DUNBAR**

*by James D. Corrothers*

He came, a youth, singing in the dawn  
Of a new freedom, glowing o'er his lyre,  
Refining, as with great Apollo's fire,  
His people's gift of song. And thereupon,  
This Negro singer, come to Helicon  
Constrained the masters, listening to admire,  
And roused a race to wonder and aspire,  
Gazing which way their honest voice was gone,  
With ebon face uplit of glory's crest.  
Men marveled at the singer, strong and sweet,  
Who brought the cabin's mirth, the tuneful night,  
But faced the morning, beautiful with light,  
To die while shadows yet fell toward the west,  
And leave his laurels at his people's feet.  
Dunbar, no poet wears your laurels now;  
None rises, singing, from your race like you.  
Dark melodist, immortal, though the dew  
Fell early on the bays upon your brow,  
And tinged with pathos every halcyon vow  
And brave endeavor. Silence o'er you threw  
Flowerets of love. Or, if an envious few  
Of your own people brought no garlands, how  
Could Malice smite him whom the gods had crowned?  
If, like the meadow-lark, your flight was low  
Your flooded lyrics half the hilltops drowned;  
A wide world heard you, and it loved you so  
It stilled its heart to list the strains you sang,  
And o'er your happy songs its plaudits rang.

Source: Johnson, James Weldon, ed. *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922; BoondocksNet Edition, 2001).

<http://www.boondocksnet.com/editions/anp/anp017.html>

*Assessments with Rubrics:*

To assess the impact of this field trip and related activities, the following written assignment is suggested:

Write a short paper (3-4 pages) exploring two of the following three themes:

1. Paul Laurence Dunbar's life, career and lasting legacy;
2. Some factors contributing to the success of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poetry during his lifetime; and / or
3. Remembering that Paul Laurence Dunbar died at age 33, project some world-changing thing you would like to accomplish by the time you are that old. Give some insights into how you might achieve this.

**WRITING RUBRIC - GRADE 9**

	CONTENT	GRAMMAR	LEGIBILITY	MECHANIC	EFFORT
4	On topic	All sentences complete and coherent	Very legible	Correct capitalization, punctuation, and spelling	Very engaged; significant energy expended
3	Somewhat topical	Most sentences complete and coherent	Mostly legible	Mostly correct capitalization, punctuation and spelling	Somewhat engaged; adequate energy expended
2	Very little connection to content	Some sentences complete and coherent	Somewhat legible	Some correct capitalization, punctuation and spelling	Not very engaged; little energy expended
1	Not on topic	Filled with incomplete and incoherent sentences	Not legible	Little correct capitalization, punctuation and spelling	Disengaged; no energy expended

- Extensions:*
- 1) Discuss dialect and Standard English composition styles. Where did the dialect style that Dunbar published come from? How and why did it develop? Did other authors use this style of writing? Is dialect still used / published / recorded today, and if so, by whom? What is the relationship between Dunbar's dialect and modern Ebonics?
  - 2) The University of Dayton's Dunbar website (<http://www.plethorum.org/dunbar/teacher.asp>) includes printed texts, audio recordings and study questions for seven of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poems. Divide the class into seven groups. Assign each group one of the poems. After listening to, reading and discussing their poem, have each group present the poem, study questions and answers to the rest of the class.

*Cross-discipline Activities:*

**ART:** Using library books (see the bibliography above or your school's library catalogue) or works available online at <http://www.libraries.wright.edu/dunbar/>, select a favorite poem written by Paul Laurence Dunbar. Using 8.5 x 14" (legal size) paper, write out the text in large, decorative letters (calligraphy). Illuminate the letters and illustrate the theme(s) of the poem using the medium of your choice. Include no more than two paragraphs on a single sheet of paper. Present and interpret your artwork to the class.

**MUSIC:** Along with a partner, select a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar and set it to a familiar tune or to a melody of your own devising. Be sure to match the tone / emotion of the poem with that of the music. If possible, perform the song for your class (either live or recorded on tape / CD).

**SPEECH:** Draw up debate teams of three or four students. Have teams strategize, re-search and present orderly arguments pro and con:

- Child labor
- Relocating in search of work or staying and learning a new line of work
- Poverty as a barrier to or springboard for success in life
- The importance (or unimportance) of poetry
- The use of dialect vs. standard English in school
- Rural life vs. city life: which is best?
- Paul Laurence Dunbar's role in the struggle for civil rights
- Your team's ideas on how to end racism in America today

**ENGLISH COMPOSITION / ORAL HISTORY:** Paul Laurence Dunbar's mother loved songs, poetry and storytelling. She inspired him to also love these things also. Reflect on the songs, poems and stories that have been handed down in your family. Hand write or word process at least 6 (six). Collect these and make them into a family literary journal. Ask your parents or grandparents for help in remembering the details. Be sure to credit the author /source of each item.

**SOCIAL STUDIES:** Research your family's origins. When did your ancestors immigrate? Where did they come from, and where did they settle? What kinds of work did they do? Where have you lived? Why and when did your parent(s) move? Using maps and timelines, chart out this data.

### CLASS PROJECT: STAGE A DUNBAR RECITAL.

Several printed programs from public recitals featuring the work of Paul Laurence Dunbar are posted in the Visitor Center entry hallway. Have the class take note of these. Then, as a class, decide how to stage your own Dunbar recital.

Divide the class into work groups as follows:

- A group to select Dunbar Poems and read them aloud at the recital;
- A group to select 1900-era music and perform it at the recital;
- A group to make physical arrangements: selecting the date, time, and place of the recital, making those arrangements, decorating and setting up;
- A group to work on publicity: creating invitations and sending them to other classes, the families of students, school faculty and staff. Produce printed programs to hand out at the event, and serve as ushers. (Be sure to include a little data about Paul Laurence Dunbar and his career in both the invitations and the programs.)

A recital is a rather formal setting, so think of dressing appropriately and playing the part.

If you want to lighten the tone, you can make this a café experience by serving beverages (cocoa, coffee, tea, lemonade, water) to your guests and dressing casually.

#### *Materials / Resources Needed:*

For the field trip: reservations, transportation, and extra adult supervision. Ask students to bring paper and pen or pencil for taking notes on what they see and hear at the site. These notes will be of assistance in the follow-up activities and assessment exercise.

Materials needed for cross-discipline activities will vary according to the activity.