

DR. ALAIN LOCKE

Gay African American Educator (1886-1954)



Born into a family of teachers, Alain Locke completed Harvard's four year program in three years, graduated second in his 1907 class, was elected into Phi Beta Kappa, and won the school's most distinguished award, The Bowdoin Prize. Afterwards, Locke became the first African-American to be named a Rhodes Scholar and received his scholarship to Oxford. After receiving his PhD in 1917, Locke became philosophy professor at Howard University, an African American School, where he remained until his retirement. In 1925 he edited 'The New Negro: An Interpretation' – the signature anthology of the Harlem Renaissance and also edited 'Four Negro Poets' (1927). By this time Locke was actively promoting his theory of 'cultural pluralism' which maintained that a democratic society should value the uniqueness of the different styles within that culture, thus encouraging African-American artists to embrace their ancestral and folk traditions. A homosexual himself, Locke also helped gay African-American artists like Countee Cullen and Richard Bruce Nugent find pride in their heritage. In the 1930s he established Associates in Negro Folk Education. As the leading authority on African American culture he wrote 'Negro Art: Past and Present', 'The Negro and His Music,' and edited 'The Negro in Art.' In 1945 he became the first African American president of the American Association of Adult Education. In 1953 he secured a Phi Beta Kappa chapter at Howard University, a major milestone in the history of African American education. In 1954 he was still working on 'The Negro in American Culture,' his definitive study of the contributions of African-Americans to American society, when he died of a heart ailment at age 67.



Lesson Plan

Level 1: Contributions Approach

1. Activate Prior Experience: What do you know about Locke, the artist and poet?
2. Read about him here <https://legacyprojectchicago.org/person/dr-alain-locke>
3. Group Discussion: How did Locke's educational training promoted his philosophy?
4. Extend Knowledge: How did Locke promote other African-American artists, writers, and musicians? View <https://www.britannica.com/art/African-American-literature/The-rise-of-the-New-Negro>

Level 2: Additive Approach

1. Explore https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alain_LeRoy_Locke#Sexual_orientation. Locke referred to his sexual orientation as his point of "vulnerable/invulnerability". Explain in your own words what that means and share why you think he felt that way.
2. Read this piece on Locke's philosophy and influences at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/alain-locke/>. Summarize his views on race, pluralism, and cultural relativism.
3. Read the biography of poet and activist Essex Hemphill at <https://legacyprojectchicago.org/person/essex-hemphill>. How would you compare Hemphill's philosophy about life and racial identity to Locke's? Pick a classmate and act out a conversation between them.

Level 3: Transformational Approach

1. Locke was well-respected for engaging with colleagues and his students. Read <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/locke-alain-1886-1954/> and explain why he excelled as a teacher.
2. Read <http://rictornorton.co.uk/cullen.htm> and explain the basis of the trust Cullen shared with Locke.
3. Read <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/09/15/347132309/alain-locke-whose-ashes-were-found-in-university-archives-is-buried>. Explain why Locke has been recognized as "The Father of the Harlem Renaissance"?

Level 4: Social Action Approach

1. During problematic times in the United States, Locke made an historical impact. Watch this video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLt9VolqUN0&feature=emb_title and explain to the class in your own words why Alain Locke's views mattered in the past and whether or not you think they are still relevant today.
2. After learning about the accomplishments of this gay, African American philosopher, how would you advocate for those who are prominent today?
3. Provide several contemporary examples of people you know of whose views on race, culture, and variant sexuality/identity are shaping modern reality.