



Poetry Recitation & Copywork

Poetry Selections

This session's featured poet is James Weldon Johnson. We've included three poetry selections for your kids and teens to read, listen to, memorize, and recite. They are:

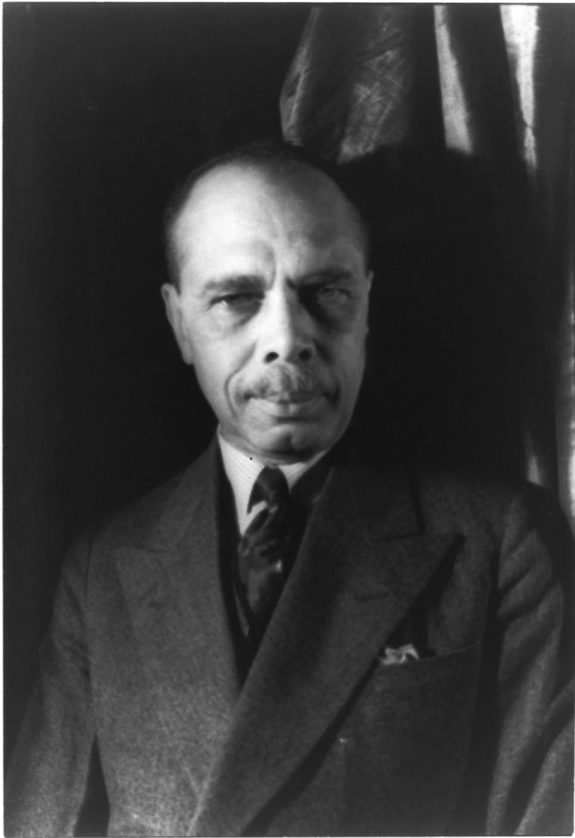
- The Creation
- Father Father Abraham
- I Hear The Stars Still Singing

For copy work, we have included Zaner-Bloser style handwriting sheets for primary, elementary, and cursive, as well as college-ruled for older students. The poems we have chosen are:

- The Creation
- Father, Father Abraham
- I Hear The Stars Still Singing

"Music is a universal art; anybody's music belongs to everybody; you can't limit it to race or country."

~ James Weldon Johnson



James Weldon Johnson

June 17, 1871 – June 26, 1938

James Weldon Johnson was an African-American poet, best known for his political activism and influence during the Harlem Renaissance.

Johnson was born on June 17, 1871, in Jacksonville, Florida. He was the son of Helen Louise Dillet and James Johnson and grew up with his four siblings. He attended Atlanta University and became a prominent campus speaker, graduating in 1894 with a bachelor's degree. He then returned to Jacksonville and taught at an African American elementary school before being ultimately promoted to principal.

In 1901, Johnson and his brother moved to New York City, where they worked at a musical theater and wrote songs that made it onto Broadway. He later participated in Theodore Roosevelt's presidential campaign. After the campaign's success, Roosevelt appointed Johnson as United States consul at Puerto Cabello, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

In 1910, Johnson married Grace Nail, and the two worked on screenwriting projects together. After Nicaragua, they returned to New York and both became involved in the Harlem Renaissance. Grace acted as a hostess, mentor, and teacher, and she regularly organized events for Harlem artists. Meanwhile, Johnson wrote poetry and essays, and he became one of the most important voices during this era.

Johnson wrote his first book, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, in 1912, and it is considered a prime example of early American literature. His powerful writing combined with his activism earned him the title of a Black Leader among civil rights activists in the early 20th century. He wrote many collections of poems, essays, novels, and operas during his lifetime. Some of his most famous works include *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (1927), and the opera, *De Organizer*.

He later became involved in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and quickly rose to prominence as a leader in the civil rights movement. In 1920, he was appointed executive secretary of the NAACP, where he worked for two decades. During this time, he advocated for racial equality and economic justice, and he worked to end voting restrictions for African Americans. He also helped found the National Urban League in 1910, which fought discrimination against Black people in housing, education, and employment.

Johnson received numerous awards during his lifetime, and his legacy as a prominent writer and civil rights leader continues today. In 1926, he was inducted into the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, and in 1976, he was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Gerald Ford. Johnson's work and influence continue to be celebrated around the world. He died in a car accident on June 26, 1938, in Wiscasset, Maine at the age of 67.

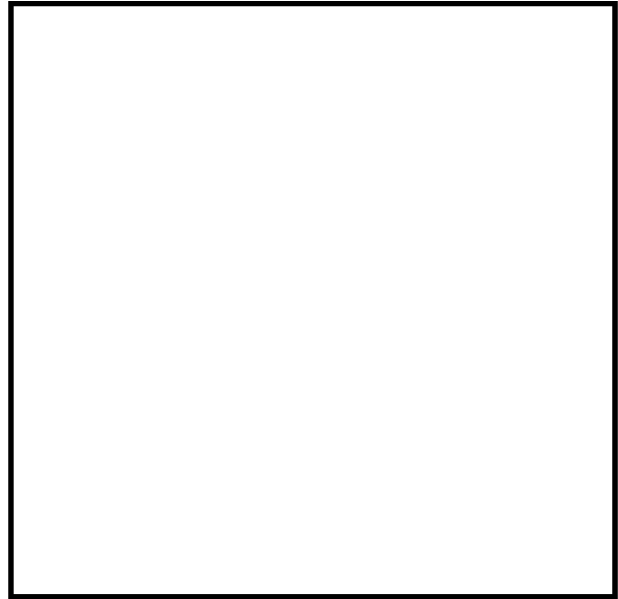
Today, his legacy remains alive through the James Weldon Johnson Institute at Emory University, which was established to honor his work and preserve his legacy. He is remembered as an influential writer, civil rights activist, poet laureate, and educator who dedicated his life to improving the lives of African Americans in America.

Poet Study

Poet: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Place of Birth: _____



3 Facts About the Poet:

Best Known Poems by the Poet:

James Weldon Johnson Selections

The Creation

And God stepped out on space,
And He looked around and said:
I'm lonely—
I'll make me a world.

And far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled, And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said: That's good!

Then God reached out and took the light in His
hands,
And God rolled the light around in His hands
Until He made the sun;
And He set that sun a-blazing in the heavens.
And the light that was left from making the sun
God gathered it up in a shining ball
And flung it against the darkness,
Spangling the night with the moon and stars.
Then down between
The darkness and the light
He hurled the world;
And God said: That's good!

Then God himself stepped down—
And the sun was on His right hand,
And the moon was on His left;
The stars were clustered about His head,
And the earth was under His feet.
And God walked, and where He trod
His footsteps hollowed the valleys out
And bulged the mountains up.

Then He stopped and looked and saw
That the earth was hot and barren.
So God stepped over to the edge of the world
And He spat out the seven seas—
He batted his eyes, and the lightnings flashed—
He clapped his hands, and the thunders rolled—
And the waters above the earth came down,
The cooling waters came down.

Then the green grass sprouted,
And the little red flowers blossomed,
The pine tree pointed His finger to the sky,
And the oak spread out His arms,
The lakes cuddled down in the hollows of the
ground,
And the rivers ran down to the sea;
And God smiled again, And the rainbow appeared,
And curled itself around His shoulder.

Then God raised His arm and He waved His hand
Over the sea and over the land,
And He said: Bring forth! Bring forth!
And quicker than God could drop His hand,
Fishes and fowls
And beasts and birds
Swam the rivers and the seas,
Roamed the forests and the woods,
And split the air with their wings.
And God said: That's good!

Then God walked around,
And God looked around
On all that He had made.
He looked at his sun,
And He looked at His moon,
And He looked at His little stars;
He looked on His world
With all its living things,
And God said: I'm lonely still.

Then God sat down—
On the side of a hill where he could think;
By a deep, wide river He sat down;
With His head in his hands,
God thought and thought,
Till He thought:
I'll make me a man!

Up from the bed of the river God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river He kneeled him down;
And there the great God Almighty
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;
This great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till He shaped it in his own image;

Then into it He blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

Father, Father Abraham

Father, Father Abraham,
Today look on us from above;
On us, the offspring of thy faith,
The children of thy Christ-like love.

For that which we have humbly wrought,
Give us today thy kindly smile;
Wherein we've failed or fallen short,
Bear with us, Father, yet awhile.

Father, Father Abraham,
Today we lift our hearts to thee,
Filled with the thought of what great price
Was paid, that we might ransomed be.

Today we consecrate ourselves
Anew in hand and heart and brain,
To send this judgment down the years:
The ransom was not paid in vain.

I Hear The Stars Still Singing

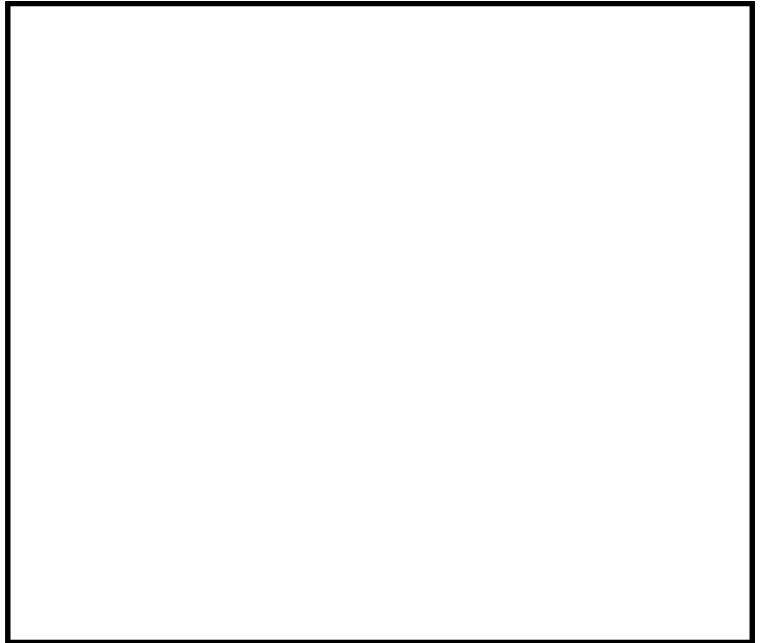
I hear the stars still singing
To the beautiful, silent night,
As they speed with noiseless winging
Their ever westward flight.
I hear the waves still falling
On the stretch of lonely shore,
But the sound of a sweet voice calling
I shall hear, alas! no more.

Poetry Study

Title:

Type of Poem:

Use the box to at right to draw a picture of what the poem brings to mind.



Write one thing you liked and did not like about the poem:

Write three adjectives about the poem.

Compose a few lines of your own poem inspired by this work
