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Books and Bookmarks
COMPLEMENTARY AND LINK MODULES

Multiethnic Voices
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- Audiocassettes and music cassette of *Books and Bookmarks*
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TO THE TEACHER

The material in this booklet is from Volume 2B of the main Course, Books and Bookmarks. It can be used by those who have adopted the compact version of Books and Bookmarks or any other Course book: it provides linking or complementary materials which can easily integrate into a literary curriculum enabling students to experience a new and important aspect of their literary studies.

This booklet gathers voices of 20th-century writers who are outside the mainstream of British and American life and undermines the belief that there is a single ‘British’ or ‘American’ identity.

It can be used to expand your knowledge of movements and issues of the 20th century as it offers a glimpse of tradition and innovation within literatures in English from ethnic groups living in Britain and the US. It can also be used independently for other purposes, for example, the booklet can be exploited to analyse the interaction between literature and history since it systematically relates the literary works to their historical background.

The booklet is not accompanied by a Teacher’s Guide: for keys to the activities, teachers can download appropriate sections of the Books and Bookmarks Teacher’s Guide from the Loescher website www.loescher.it/booksandbookmarks, or refer to the printed Guide of the main volume of Books and Bookmarks.

The booklet does, however, contain self-study materials for review, extension and test preparation purposes.

TO THE STUDENT

This booklet will guide you to listen to the voices of a novelist and of a poet from multiethnic and multicultural Great Britain. It will also lead you into African American literature as well as into a meaningful number of other ethnic American literatures (by Native Americans, Asian Americans and Mexican Americans). The authors are all from the 20th century and their works well illustrate what it means to be living in a mainstream culture which you often feel a stranger to.

You may refer to the last section of the booklet called Personal File to find materials and activities which can facilitate your learning process.
Multiethnic Voices and Issues in Great Britain and the United States

The Module is built on the assumption that literature can be a mirror to multiethnic societies. The analysis of works by writers with varied national and cultural heritages based in Britain and the US can offer you an insight into a few issues which are distinctive of these types of societies in the 20th century. Throughout the various Steps which make up the Module, a historical perspective is systematically linked to the works and authors.

**LEVEL**
- intermediate

**TYPE OF MODULE**
- textual, contextual, interdisciplinary

**PREREQUISITES**
- knowledge of some aspects of narrative technique (narrator, character)
- knowledge of the conventions of poetry (layout, run-on lines vs end-stopped lines, rhyme, free verse)
- basic notion of theme and how to identify it
- knowledge of the main conventions of the language of visual art

**OBJECTIVES**
- analyse literary texts by a large variety of writers with varied national and cultural heritages and identify the themes and issues they express
- link literary texts and themes to their historical/social/cultural background

**MATERIALS**

**FICTION**
- from *Black Boy* (1945) by Richard Wright
- from *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison
- from *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker
- from *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) by Amy Tan
- from *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) by Hanif Kureishi

**POETRY**
- *Po’ Boy Blues* (1926) by Langston Hughes

**DOCUMENTS**

**TIME**
- approx. 20 hours

**LINKS**

BEYOND LITERATURE:
- Film, *The Joy Luck Club*
- Music, *Nobody Knows de Trouble I See, Stoptime Rag*
- Visual Art, *The Migration Series*
LEAD IN

Growing Multi-Cultural

Italians are among the world’s great movers. In past centuries they have emigrated all over the world and have enriched the cultures of their new host countries. Recently Italy has enjoyed greater economic stability and power and it has become the focus for immigrants rather than ‘emigrants’. Italy is fast becoming a multi-cultural society.

1 Look at the list of countries below and mark with an ‘E’ those to which many Italians have emigrated and with an ‘I’ the countries from which many of Italy’s recent immigrants have come.

- the United States
- Ghana
- Argentina
- Great Britain
- Bangladesh
- Albania
- Canada
- The Philippines
- India
- Belgium
- Nigeria
- Croatia
- Germany
- Switzerland
- France
- Romania
- Brazil

2 Italian society has recently become multi-cultural on a large scale. What signs have you noticed around you of how they are enriching Italian life? What short-term difficulties may arise? Write a list after pooling your ideas through group work or class work.

STEP One

Voices from Britain

OBJECTIVES

In Step One you will:

- analyse an extract from a novel by Hanif Kureishi to identify features of his narrative style, language and humour
- analyse two poems by Benjamin Zephaniah to identify his themes and style
- connect Kureishi’s writing and Zephaniah’s poems with the historical context and their biographies
- learn about multicultural literature in Great Britain

HANIF KUREISHI (b. 1954)

The Buddha of Suburbia (1990)

One of the most refreshing and humorous new voices to come from Great Britain is that of Hanif Kureishi, a playwright, screenplay writer and author of fiction.
The extract you will read is taken from the very beginning of his novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which tells the story of a young British teenager - his family, his loves and first steps in the world of work as an actor.

1. **Read the text and then read Kureishi’s biography** (➔ p. 11). What have the protagonist, Karim, and Kureishi got in common?

2. **Karim says at line 12 that that evening “everything changed”. What were his father’s normal evening habits? What did he do that particular evening?**

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don’t care — Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it. Anyway, why search the inner room when it’s enough to say that I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family, I don’t know why. Quite frankly, it was all getting me down and I was ready for anything.

Then one day everything changed. In the morning things were one way and by bedtime another. I was seventeen.

On this day my father hurried home from work not in a gloomy mood. His mood was high, for him. I could smell the train on him as he put his briefcase away behind the front door and took off his raincoat, chucking it over the bottom of the banisters. He grabbed my fleeing little brother, Allie, and kissed him; he kissed my mother and me with enthusiasm, as if we’d recently been rescued from an earthquake. More normally, he handed Mum his supper: a packet of kebabs and chapatis so greasy their paper wrapper had disintegrated. Next, instead of flopping into a chair to watch the television news and wait for Mum to put the warmed-up food on the table, he went into their bedroom, which was downstairs next to the living room. He quickly stripped to his vest and underpants.

“Fetch the pink towel,” he said to me.

I did so. Dad spread it on the bedroom floor and fell on to his knees. I wondered if he’d suddenly taken up religion. But no, he placed his arms beside his head and kicked himself into the air.

“I must practise,” he said in a stifled voice.

“Fetch the pink towel,” he said to me.

I did so. Dad spread it on the bedroom floor and fell on to his knees. I wondered if he’d suddenly taken up religion. But no, he placed his arms beside his head and kicked himself into the air.

“Fetch the pink towel,” he said to me.

I did so. Dad spread it on the bedroom floor and fell on to his knees. I wondered if he’d suddenly taken up religion. But no, he placed his arms beside his head and kicked himself into the air.

“Fetch the pink towel,” he said to me.

I did so. Dad spread it on the bedroom floor and fell on to his knees. I wondered if he’d suddenly taken up religion. But no, he placed his arms beside his head and kicked himself into the air.

“I must practise,” he said in a stifled voice.
3 Now focus on Kureishi’s narrative technique and style.
   a What kind of narrator has he chosen for the novel? What is the effect of this choice?
   b How can you describe the language and tone of the text? Is it formal/informal, colloquial/neutral/elevated, intimate/distant?

One of the features of Kureishi’s writing which is greatly appreciated by his readers is his irreverent sense of humour.

4 Look at these examples of humour and assign them to one of the categories on the right.
   1 “His mood was high, for him.”
   2 “Anyway, why search the inner room”
   3 “as if we’d recently been rescued from an earthquake.”
   4 “My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred”
   5 “Englishman I am (though not proud of it)”

   a) surprising juxtaposition of words, ideas
   b) pompous style followed by anticlimax
   c) mocking of other styles of novel writing or behaviour
   d) personal aside from the narrator
   e) exaggeration for effect (hyperbole)

5 Did your reading of the extract arouse interest in the novel? Would you like to read on? Say why/why not.

BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH (b. 1958)

from Propa Propaganda (1996)

The second voice from multiethnic and multicultural Great Britain is that of Benjamin Zephaniah, a British Rasta° poet of Jamaican parentage living in London who describes himself as an oral poet.

The two poems included in the Module are from his collection Propa Propaganda, 1996.

Text one

INDEPENDENCE

1 Read the poem Independence on the following page.

   a Consider the repeated parts of the poem.
   1 “dis land” is described in terms of the things/aspects it lacks. Are they all negative?
   2 What do the inhabitants (the “we” of the poem) proudly assert they have?

° Rasta, short form for Rastafarian, indicates follower of Marcus Garvey who worships the Almighty in the person of Haile Selassie, the former Emperor of Ethiopia. This kind of religion teaches that black West Indians will return to Africa. Rastafarians often wear their hair in dreadlocks.
Do you think “dis land” refers to a specific country? Or does it stand for all the lands which were colonised and have now gained their independence?

**Independence**

No house
No money
No milk
No honey
But dis land is ours.

No bricks
No mortar
No private water,
No roads
No signs
No enemy mines,
No work
No play
Just dried up clay,
But what?
Dis land is ours.

That little piece of sun is ours
We borrow clouds from neighbours,
We got air
We got we
No industry
But we are free
And asking you no favours.

**2 The speaker addresses a listener.**

*What do the listener’s eyes show?*
*What attitude does the speaker have towards him? What does he invite the listener to do?*

**3 Consider the language and the lettering in the poem.**

*What kind of syntax is used (long sentences, short sentences, phrases, single words...)?*
*Where in the poem does the spelling reproduce the pronunciation of the speaker? Why do you think the poet made this choice?*
*What word is highlighted within another word by the use of capital letters? What connection is there between that and the English word ‘motherland’?*

**4 Read Zephaniah’s biography (» p. 11). What connections can you establish with the poem?**

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1. mortar, mixture of sand, lime and water used in building for holding bricks together (malta).
2. mines, types of bomb hidden below the ground that explode when touched (mine).
3. clay, type of earth (argilla).
4. rank, certain class or level (rango).
5. lust, strong desire for something (cupidigia).
Text two

ACTS OF PARLIAMENT: MOTION 2

Here is a second poem by Zephaniah, Acts of Parliament: motion 2. Read the text. Which word in your view expresses the speaker's view of politics and politicians? How many times is it repeated? How is it emphasised? Is it related to other words in the poem?

Acts of Parliament: motion

John Major announced
Something.
Tony Blair said
Something.
Betty Boothroyd rose from her seat
And expounded
Something.
Something was debated
And something was agreed
And that was nothing.
Some times some things
Need
Changing.
Some things some times
Need something.
And politicians are
Something
Else.
The next time you see a politician
Tell them
Something.
And if you are visualistic
Show them
Something.
Today in Parliament
Something was made out of nothing
And nobody kept saying something.

The type of poetry the poems belong to is spoken poetry – poetry meant to be read aloud, poetry which has a strong rhythmical beat like a chant.

Listen to both texts. What makes them different from the type of poetry you are used to?

Zephaniah is one of the poets of British multicultural society. Great Britain had long had ethnic and national minority groups before the 20th century. Immigration increased when the process of decolonization began in 1947 (the year India and Pakistan were granted independence) and started to slow down after the mid-1960s when most larger British colonies had become independent. Though the UK now seems to look more towards Europe, the issue of multicultural society and integration remains important.

Read the Bookmark printed on the following page and say:

– in which period migration changed from outflow from Britain to inflow into Britain
– when race first became a source of open social conflict
– when West Indians began to be a large community in Britain
– what happened in the 80s and 90s.

1. motion, a formal proposal that is discussed and voted on (mozione).
2. John Major, Conservative Prime Minister (1990-97).
4. Betty Boothroyd, the first woman to be elected speaker of the House of Commons in 1992.
5. expounded, explained in detail (illustro).
**The UK as a Multicultural Society**

**A Few Facts About the UK (2001 est.)**

- **Population:** 59,647,790
- **Net migration rate:** 1.07 migrant(s)/1,000 population
- **Ethnic groups:** English 81.5%, Scottish 9.6%, Irish 2.4%, Welsh 1.9%, Ulster 1.8%, West Indian, Indian, Pakistani, and other 2.8%
- **Religions:** Anglican 27 million, Roman Catholic 9 million, Muslim 1 million, Presbyterian 800,000, Methodist 760,000, Sikh 400,000, Hindu 350,000, Jewish 300,000

**The Making of Multiethnic Society in 20th Century Great Britain**

**1900-30** Over 20 million people, mainly from Scotland, Ireland and Northern England, left Britain for countries overseas, usually the Commonwealth and the US.

**1931-40** Extensive immigration into Britain from the Irish Republic and from Europe, including thousands of refugees from nazism and fascism.

**1950-68** The period saw an increase in immigration from Commonwealth countries, especially of West Indians, Indians, Pakistanis and Africans. They were full British subjects and entitled to settle in Britain to which they were lure by the promise of employment and affluent life. They, however, met with antagonism from landlords, employers and fellow workers. The ‘dark strangers’, as they were called, had soon to face white racism. In 1958 violent race riots broke out in Notting Hill, London, between West Indian immigrants and local whites.

The Government tried to prevent race from becoming a national political issue. On one hand it strengthened control over immigration through the first and second Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962, 1968) which gave it power to restrict the number of people from the Commonwealth and the Irish Republic. On the other, it tried hard to outlaw discrimination against those already settled in the country.

**1970-79** Negative economic circumstances led to riots and clashes. The basic problems were housing, lack of job opportunities, especially for the young and the mistrust felt between immigrant communities and the police.

**1980 to the present day** Margaret Thatcher’s leadership did not ease the race issue. There were further restrictions for ethnic minorities who felt discriminated against by English
In Birmingham and London in 1985, race riots broke out and society was generally tense. Immigrants tended to live in the poor inner city areas, and unemployment among them was twice as high as among the white population. They were under-represented in Parliament. In the 1990s, attempts were made to encourage mutual cultural respect and value is now being given to Britain’s cultural diversity and new cultural richness.


The painting expresses the problems of people migrating from one place to another; they try to couple fragments of their roots culture with aspects and values of the host country. They are caught between two cultures.

Boyce (b. 1962) is a Caribbean artist living in England.

**STUDY BOX**

**Diversity in Literature**

1. Using the following key words as your reference points, give a short oral presentation on Hanif Kureishi and his novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

   - Pakistani father
   - English mother
   - Royal Court Theatre
   - London plays
   - screenplays
   - young Asians
   - suburban London
   - Margaret Thatcher
   - Karim Amir
   - teenager
   - family
   - seventeen
   - change
   - father
   - pink towel

2. Below are a few statements about Benjamin Zephaniah and his poems *Independence* and *Acts of Parliament: motion 2*.

   Agree (✔) or disagree according to what you have read by and about him in this Step.

   - ✔ 1 Zephaniah’s poetry and life are concerned more with Jamaica than England.
   - ✔ 2 In an interview Zephaniah claimed that the headline he would most like to read is “Politics is Abolished and Music Takes Over”.
   - ✔ 3 In his performances he usually sings his poems.
   - ✔ 4 The roots of his poetry are in Jamaica.
   - ✔ 5 In the poem *Independence* Zephaniah displays more sense of irony than in *Acts of Parliament: motion 2*.
   - ✔ 6 The opening lines in the poem *Independence* read, “No house / No money / No milk / No honey / But dis land is free”.
   - ✔ 7 What makes his poetry memorable is the use of spoken language.
   - ✔ 8 He regards English as a multiethnic language.
Amongst the many quality writers who have settled or whose parents settled in Britain during the 20th century, two names have gained particular popularity with the reading public – Hanif Kureishi, playwright, screenplay writer and novelist and Benjamin Zephaniah, poet and novelist. Both writers are greatly appreciated for their humour, their directness and honesty and their easy-to-read colloquial styles. They both have a lot to teach their readers, too, on issues such as racism, poverty, immigration and sexuality but they achieve these aims with a sensitive and light-hearted approach which renders their works highly palatable.

His first and perhaps best novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* tells the story of a seventeen-year old Londoner whose father came from Bombay to study at a British University and then settled, marrying an English girl he met in a dance hall. The protagonist and narrator, Karim comes of age in the course of the novel as he discovers his father’s affair with a middle-class woman interested in Middle Eastern culture, as he discovers the joys of sex with both boys and girls and as he tries his wings on the stage of a London fringe theatre. It is, however, not only a novel of individual growth and discovery. Its mixed-race protagonist and its suburban setting dictate a fundamental interest in the London of the 1980s, influenced by the Tory outlook on issues such as racism, immigration and economic success. The reader is invited to meditate and explore these issues, yet the author’s style is far from being heavily didactic, it instead maintains its hilarious sense of humour and draws on vivid characterisation.

Zephaniah has been called a ‘dub’ poet, an ‘oral’ poet, a ‘performance’ poet, a ‘rap’ poet, a ‘Rasta’ poet, a ‘reggae’ poet and even a ‘black’ poet. He admits that if he had to choose one he would start with ‘oral’ poet and adds, “The oral tradition is timeless, it is simply the tradition of passing on information orally and much of this information is handed down in the form of poems, songs and stories. People in the Western world tend to see the oral tradition as something from the past and not relevant in the age of the Internet, but elsewhere the tradition carries on regardless. The oral tradition thrives when there are restrictions on peoples’ abilities to speak or when they have no access to the media.”

Black British poetry arose through performance and dub poetry, which has its roots in Jamaica and is closely linked to Reggae music. Poets like Linton Kwesi Johnson (b. 1952) and Zephaniah set the trend for dub poetry in the 1980s, in the years of the conflict between black youths and police (Bookmark *The UK as a Multicultural Society*, p. 8). This kind of black British poetry has strong rhythms, combines with music, is political, is not meant to remain on the page and requires a close relationship with the audience.

Zephaniah is one of the leading voices of the black community which settled in Britain in the course of post-war immigration. His poems are set against the political landscape of Britain and are about how one feels living in a racist, globalized world. As a poet, Zephaniah is outspoken, direct and even ironical when in *Acts of Parliament: motion 2* he looks upon the “nothingness” of old institutions like the British Parliament. In *Independence* he sounds proud of people who recover their land and their freedom and can tell those who had in the past lied to them, “sail on”. The language of his poems is not standard English: he writes phonetically and uses a mixture of English and Jamaican.

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*dub*, a type of West Indian music or poetry with a strong beat.

*reggae*, a type of West Indian popular music with strong rhythms.

BIOGRAPHY

HANIF KUREISHI (b. 1954)

Life and Works

Contents, Themes and Style
Throughout his work the effect of racial pressure is evident. He deals with the lives of young Asians, first and second generation immigrants, growing up in suburban London during the time of the Tory Government of Margaret Thatcher. He focuses on the negative aspects of capitalism, the problems and challenges of cross-cultural relationships and issues of homo- and hetero-sexuality. His work is marked by a strong and irreverent sense of humour which softens and renders more palatable its didactic qualities.

Fortune
Kureishi has become popular with the public, particularly regarding his stance on race, gender and left-wing politics. He has also won acclaim from critics for his honest and direct approach to writing, his technical prowess, his irreverent humour and the quality of his characterisation. His screenplay, My Beautiful Laundrette, received an Oscar nomination for ’Best Screenplay’ in 1985.

BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH (b. 1958)

Life and Works
Benjamin Zephaniah is a poet, novelist, actor, TV/radio presenter. He was born in Birmingham, England, in 1958. His childhood was not without incident: he was expelled from school, got into trouble with the police, was sent to a reform school and then put into prison for a crime he hadn’t committed. In 1979, after moving to London, he found a job in a workers’ cooperative and began writing, soon publishing his first book of poems. He became involved in performance poetry, often performed at festivals and appeared in television and radio programmes. In 1988 he was shortlisted for Oxford Professor of Poetry, losing to the future Nobel prize-winner Seamus Heaney. In the last few years he has acted in BBC TV and radio plays, involved himself in many political debates ranging from Black British life to Middle Eastern politics, performed poetry at festivals and charity events.


Content and Themes
Being bicultural his poems are both about life and surroundings in England and Jamaica. He regards the latter country as his second home, but does not hold any idealised view of it. His themes are more British and touch upon vegetarianism, ecology, politics. In his own words poetry, politics and performance are the loves of his life.

Style
Coming from a Jamaican background, the relationship between music and poetry is very close. They are partners and this shows in the strong rhythms which characterise his lines. He often makes records which are a mixture of reggae and dance music with spoken poetry and no singing. His language is predominantly Jamaican in flavour, but also undeniably British.

Fortune
He is the best of all the performance poets that emerged in the late 70s/early 80s.
**The Origin and Development of African American Literature**

**OBJECTIVES**

In Step Two you will:

- analyse some literary extracts from works by African American writers of different periods
- relate the works to their cultural, social and political context
- compare and contrast different themes and issues

The selection of texts and documents below is meant to give you an insight into the main steps in the development of an autonomous black literature in the US, first in antithesis to white literature and later in close interrelation with it.

**The Emergence of Black Literature**

African American literature is closely interwoven with its socio-historical background. It is also deeply rooted in oral tradition and its music. Some background knowledge is therefore essential to understand its origins and development in a literary and social context dominated by white culture.

1. **Study the Bookmark below.**
   a. Summarise the social situation of black people before and after the Civil War pointing out the main differences between North and South.
   b. Say what original aspects of culture were eradicated and which remained and developed.
   c. Say when and how white and black cultures started to interrelate.

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**Bookmark: Black Society in the US**

**SOCIAL STATUS OF BLACK PEOPLE BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR**

Before the Civil War (1859–65) not all the black people in the US were slaves. Free blacks lived both in the North and the South in towns like Boston, Philadelphia, Charleston and New Orleans. The great majority, however, lived in the South as slaves, working mainly on cotton and tobacco plantations. There were also artisan slaves whose lives were less harsh. The men worked mainly as carpenters and blacksmiths while women worked on textiles and patchwork quilts. Between 1820 and 1840 some slaves were moved to the cities in response to the demand for semi-skilled and skilled labourers in industries and factories.

The Abolitionist movement which led to the Civil War was fuelled by the accounts of fugitive slaves and by slave narratives, but it was *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853), the novel of a white writer, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–96) which became the Bible of the Abolitionists.

**SOCIAL STATUS OF BLACK PEOPLE AFTER THE CIVIL WAR**

After the Civil War the emancipation of black people was severely hindered in the South by overt racism which took the form of segregation, that is the practice of separating or isolating members of the same society because of their race or ethnicity. In 1896 these segregationist practices were backed...
up by the Supreme Court which declared that “separate but equal” did not violate the Constitution. As a result segregation increased and large numbers of black people moved to the North in what came to be known as the **Great Migration** (1913-46). In this period the fight for desegregation developed and culminated in the New Negro movement, also called the **Negro Renaissance** in the 1920s.

**THE ORAL TRADITION AND BLACK MUSIC**
Although deprived of freedom, language and cultural roots by slavery, and later by institutionalised racism, black Americans succeeded in preserving part of their culture through oral tradition and especially through music. Plantation songs were either rhythmic accompaniments to work or religious songs lamenting the hard plight of the slaves; they were also a form of communication. African Americans created their own distinctive musical traditions by reinterpreting the white tradition they came into contact with. **Spirituals** were among the earliest **songs** to emerge from this re-interpretative process. African American music soon became very popular and was played in minstrel shows, a mixture of singing and dancing. After the Civil War, African American musicians and entertainers multiplied and the jubilee choirs, who sang spirituals, became as popular as the minstrel show, and were very successful up to the 1920s. In that decade in particular black music began to influence white music with **ragtime**, which introduced white Americans to the rhythmic vitality of African American music, and with the **blues**, which were popularised at the beginning of the century although their oral tradition dates as far back as the Civil War period. Elements of spirituals, rag and blues are also to be found in **jazz** which became widely popular in the twenties and influenced so-called serious music both in the States and abroad.

2 Refer to the painting from *The Migration Series* by J. Lawrence in the Beyond section (➔ p. 44). What connection/s is/are there with the history of the black people in the US?

➔ **THE IMAGE**: *The Migration Series*, p. 44

➔ **THE MUSIC**: *Nobody Knows de Trouble I See*, p. 46

➔ **THE MUSIC**: *Stoptime Rag*, p. 47

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Black literature as such, later to be known as African American literature, only started with the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s.

**LANGSTON HUGHES** (1902–67)

Po’ Boy Blues (1926)

The text below is a poem by Langston Hughes, one of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance. The speaker is one of the many lower-class black people who had migrated from the South into northern cities after World War I. The setting is not mentioned but it is most probably Harlem, New York.

1 Read the text and find out the reasons why in the last line the speaker says “I wish I’d never been born”.

Po’ Boy Blues

When I was home de\(^1\)
Sunshine seemed like gold.

When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.

Since I come up North de
Whole damn world’s turned cold.

I fell in love with
A gal\(^2\) I thought was kind.

Fell in love with
A gal I thought was kind.

She made me lose ma’ money
An’ almost lose ma mind.

I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong.

Yes, I was a good boy,

Never done no wrong,
But this world is weary
An’ de road is hard an’ long.

Weary, weary,
Weary early in de morn.

Weary, weary,
Early, early in de morn.

I’s\(^4\) so weary
I wish I’d never been born.


Langston Hughes was the first to incorporate the blues form into poetry. Though the blues has distinctive musical and vocal features, here we will concentrate on its verbal side which has a standardised form.

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1. *de*, (dialect) the.
2. *gal*, (dialect) girl.
3. *ma*, (dialect) my.
4. *I’s*, I am.
2 The table below summarises the major characteristics of the blues form. Which of the original aspects have been incorporated into *Po' Boy Blues*?

| Form | • The blues consists of three-line stanzas. The first line introduces a problem. The second emphasises the problem by repeating it. The third can give the solution / reveal the speaker’s feelings / show a situation which stands in contrast with what is said in the first line.  
• The rhyme scheme binds the three lines together and is usually *aa* (repetition) *a*. |
| Content | • It is intensely personal.  
• It reflects the social and psychological environment of the singer and expresses a different view of the world to that of the mainstream culture.  
• It deals with topics like love, sex, poverty, desperate search for employment, life in the ghetto and solitude, alcoholism, personal problems, etc. |
| Mood | • It is often expressive of a full heart and a troubled spirit. |

3 Taking into account subject matter, language, attitude to the white, what connections does this poem have with the oral tradition?

### Richard Wright’s Indictment of Racial Discrimination

In the development of African American literature Richard Wright is considered a pivotal figure. His autobiographical novel *Black Boy: a Record of Childhood and Youth* (1945) covers the years from 1912 to 1927 and recounts the hardships of Wright’s childhood of poverty and hunger, and his first experiences as an adolescent.

#### RICHARD WRIGHT (1908-60)

**Black Boy: a Record of Childhood and Youth** (1945)

The text on the following page is taken from Chapter 9. It relates an episode in Wright’s life when he was 17. He had just graduated and had taken up his first job “as a porter in a clothing store selling cheap goods to Negroes on credit.”

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American ‘cops’ have often been accused of using unnecessary violence against African Americans.
1 Read the text and summarise the episode it describes.

One morning, while I was polishing brass out front, the boss and his son drove up in their car. A frightened black woman sat between them. They got out and half dragged and half kicked the woman into the store. White people passed and looked on without expression. A white policeman watched from the corner, twirling his night stick; but he made no move. I watched out of the corner of my eye, but I never slackened the strokes of my chamois upon the brass. After a moment or two I heard shrill screams coming from the rear room of the store; later the woman stumbled out, bleeding, crying, holding her stomach, her clothing torn. When she reached the sidewalk, the policeman met her, grabbed her, accused her of being drunk, called a patrol wagon and carted her away.

When I went to the rear of the store, the boss and his son were washing their hands at the sink. They looked at me and laughed uneasily. The floor was bloody, strewn with wisps of hair and clothing. My face must have reflected my shock, for the boss slapped me reassuringly on the back.

“Boy, that’s what we do to niggers when they don’t pay their bills,” he said. His son looked at me and grinned.

“Here, hava cigarette,” he said.

Not knowing what to do, I took it. He lit his and held the match for me. This was a gesture of kindness, indicating that, even if they had beaten the black woman, they would not beat me if I knew enough to keep my mouth shut.

“Yes, sir,” I said.

After they had gone, I sat on the edge of a packing-box, and stared at the bloody floor until my cigarette went out.

2 Read the text again.

a Identify in the text examples of racism (that is the attitude of superiority of one race towards another) and of racial discrimination (that is the different treatment of people according to their race).

b Underline all the phrases which refer to violence.

c Drawing on your findings, outline the social context that you can infer from the text.

3 Focus on the narrator who is a black person, too.

a In what way is the behaviour of white people different towards him? Can you find a reason for the difference?

b Underline all the words and phrases that refer to the narrator’s reactions to the event. How would you describe his attitude?

impotent upset servile frightened appalled humiliated resigned

4 Read the Bookmark on the following page and find out what kind of policies was responsible for the social situation Wright denounces.
In the early twenties black society was far from mobile because of the widespread segregation which included schools, courtrooms, prisons, hospitals and even cemeteries. This was enforced by groups like the Ku Klux Klan (founded in 1865, in Tennessee) whose policy aimed at intimidating black people from taking up any public role in society. The rebellion against this system took two major forms: the Niagara movement, later the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, fought for desegregation, while the back-to-Africa movement advocated the return to Africa. These two movements were later to develop as the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. In the mid-1950s the Civil Rights movement, had a powerful leader in Martin Luther King (1929-68). King’s policy of non-violence was highly popular. His Civil Rights march on Washington in 1963, where he delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, attracted over 200,000 demonstrators. A series of laws were passed to ensure equal rights, but discrimination, especially in the South, persisted in the custom and attitudes of the people. Disillusionment about the Civil Rights movement brought about the Black Power movement in the 1960s which maintained that the only response to racism was complete withdrawal from Western society. Malcolm X was one of the leaders of the movement and was assassinated in Harlem in 1965. King also met with a violent death in Memphis in 1968.

Going Beyond Racial Issues: Ralph Ellison

You are now going to study another African American writer, Ralph Ellison, who started his career under Wright’s influence, but later enlarged the scope of his fiction.

RALPH ELLISON (1914-94)

Invisible Man (1952)

Invisible Man won the 1953 National Book Award and was described as “the most distinguished American novel written since World War II” in a poll in 1965. It deals with racial repression, but its main theme revolves around the need for individual self-awareness. Though there is a first-person narrator, the novel relies on a variety of narrative techniques including first-person narration and stream of consciousness.
SUMMARY

The book takes the form of a Bildungsroman, or novel of formation, in which the young black narrator moves from a state of innocence to one of experience. His journey starts in the American South. Here he receives his first humiliation when he addresses the community’s prominent white citizens on graduation day. He joins college on a scholarship believing that education will help him face the racial problems but, following a series of betrayals, he is expelled. He goes to Harlem in search of work, with letters of recommendation from Dr Blescoe, the president of the college, which he later discovers to be defamatory letters. When he eventually gets a job, he is involved in a factory accident of which he is held responsible. He is hospitalised and given electric shock therapy. He comes out of hospital with a new sense of racial pride and joins the Brotherhood, a communist organisation. He is involved in the Harlem race riots of the 1940s and while escaping he falls into a cellar that leads to an underground hiding place. He meditates on the meaning of his experience of ‘invisibility’ derived from society’s inability to see beyond its own racial stereotypes.

The extract below is taken from Chapter 7. The narrator has just arrived in Harlem.

1 Read the text.
   a What kind of narrative technique is employed?
   b Say what mostly strikes the narrator about Harlem supporting your statements with appropriate quotations.

I had never seen so many black people against a background of brick buildings, neon signs, plate glass and roaring traffic not even on trips I had made with the debating team¹ to New Orleans, Dallas or Birmingham. They were everywhere. So many, and moving along with so much tension and noise that I wasn’t sure whether they were about to celebrate a holiday or join in a street fight. There were even black girls behind the counters of the Five and Ten as I passed. Then at the street intersection I had the shock of seeing a black policeman directing traffic — and there were white drivers in the traffic who obeyed his signals as though it was the most natural thing in the world. Sure I had heard of it, but this was real. My courage returned. This really was Harlem and now all the stories which I had heard of the city-within-a-city leaped alive in my mind. The vet had been right: For me this was not a city of realities, but of dreams; perhaps because I had always thought of my life as being confined to the South. And now as I struggled through the lines of people a new world of possibility suggested itself to me faintly, like a small voice that was barely audible in the roar of city sounds. I moved wide-eyed, trying to take the bombardment of impressions. Then I stopped still.

2 Focus on the narrator.
   a How would you describe his reactions to what he sees?
   b What reactions suggest a social context where racial discrimination is the norm?

3 Which part/s evoke/s the past and different places?

¹ debating team, group of people who took part in formal debates on social or political subjects.
Black Women Writers: Alice Walker

After the sixties African American literature saw the emergence of a number of outstanding writers in all literary genres, particularly among women who significantly contributed to enlarge the scope of black literature in various directions.

ALICE WALKER  (b. 1944)  ➔ BIOGRAPHY, p. 24

The Color Purple  (1982)

The Color Purple is Walker’s third novel which marked a turning point in the development of her themes. It deals with the position of women in black society and their self-discovery and personal growth. It won both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award, which generated much controversy because of its exposure of incest and wife beating and for the explicit lesbianism in the book.

SUMMARY

The novel is written in epistolary form. The main character is Celie, a black girl and a victim of incest committed by her father. After her two children have been taken away from her, she is forced to marry a widower who treats her like a slave. She detests him and refers to him as Mr. ___. This part of the story is told through Celie’s letters to God. In the second part her letters are addressed to her sister Nettie who had run away from home to escape violence. Celie’s life changes when Shug, her husband’s former lover, a blues singer, comes to stay with them. Instead of jealousy she feels attraction for Shug and, following the model of this emancipated woman, Celie starts a process of self-discovery. She finds work, gains her independence and is finally reunited with her sister and her own two children.

The extract you are going to read is from the first part of the story. Celie is writing about Harpo, Mr. __’s older son who has married Sophia, a very independent woman.

1 Read the text and note down:

1 why Harpo goes to visit his father
2 what advice he is given and by whom
3 what the outcome is.

Dear God,
Harpo wants1 to know what to do to make Sofia mind. He sit out on the porch with Mr. _____ He say, I tell her one thing, she do another. Never do what I say. Always back talk2. He refers to...

To tell the truth, he sound a little proud of this to me. He refers to...

Mr. _____ don’t say nothing. Blow smoke3. Me refers to...

I tell her she can’t be all the time going to visit her sister. Us married now4, I...

1. want, wants. The third person ‘s’ is always missing.
2. Always back talk, she always talks back (mi risponde, mi tiene testa).
4. Us married now, we are married now.
tell her. Your place is here with the children. She say, I’ll take the children with me. I say, Your place is with me. She say, You want to come? She keep primping in front the glass, getting the children ready at the same time.

You ever hit her? Mr. _____ ast.

Harpo look down at his hands. Naw suh, he say low, embarrass. Well how you spect to make her mind? Wives is like children. You have to let ‘em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating.

He puff on his pipe.

Sofia think too much of herself anyway, he say. She need to be taken down a peg.

I like Sofia, but she don’t act like me at all. If she talking when Harpo and Mr. _____ come in the room, she keep right on. If they ast her where something at, she say she don’t know. Keep talking.

I think bout this when Harpo ast me what he ought to do to her to make her mind. I don’t mention how happy he is now. How three years pass and he still whistle and sing. I think bout how every time I jump when Mr. _____ call me, she look surprised. And like she pity me.

Beat her. I say.

Next time us see Harpo his face a mess of bruises. His lip cut. One of his eyes shut like a fist. He walk stiff and say his teeth ache.

I say, What happen to you, Harpo?

He say, Oh, me and that mule. She fractious, you know. She went crazy in the field the other day. By time I got her to head for home I was all banged up. Then when I got home, I walked smack dab into the crib door. Hit my eye and scratch my chin. Then when that storm come up last night I shet the window down on my hand.

Well, I say, After all that, I don’t spect you had a chance to see if you could make Sofia mind.

Nome, he say.

But he keep trying.

**2 Focus on the characters and their relationships.**

a What examples of Sophia’s independence are given?

b What do we learn about the quality of Harpo’s family life? How does it compare with Celie’s?

c What are Celie’s feeling for Sophia?

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5. You want to come? Do you want to come?
6. primping, dressing up with considerable attention (agghindarsi).
7. You ever hit her? Did you ever hit her?
8. ast, asks.
10. embarrass, embarrassed.
11. spect, expect.
12. ‘em, them.
13. got the upper hand, got the control (comanda).
14. to be taken down a peg, to make somebody feel less proud (abbassare la cresta).
15. If she talking, If she’s talking.
16. us see, we see.
17. a mess of bruises, a lot of injuries (un macello di lividi).
18. teeth.
19. What happen to you, What has happened to you.
20. fractious, bad tempered (ribelle).
21. walked smack dab, crashed (sono andato a sbattere).
22. crib, place to hold animals (stalla).
23. shet, shut.
Why does Celie advise Harpo to beat Sophia? Choose an answer from the list below or supply your own.

☐ 1 Because she is envious of Sophia’s happiness.
☐ 2 Because she has internalised the pattern of violence to which she herself is a victim.
☐ 3 Because she believes in traditional sex roles.

Bearing in mind the social context, what similarity can you see in Harpo’s and Celie’s ways of behaving?

The text is written in non-standard American English which reproduces the language of black people who have had few educational opportunities.

What effect does the use of this kind of language create?

In the 1920s an unprecedented flowering of cultural activity, known as the Harlem Renaissance developed among black intellectuals. This movement was an outlet for racial pride and self-assertion and developed mainly in the area of Harlem (in New York City) which had become a highly race-conscious community, something unprecedented in American history. Black literary journals were founded, black music became popular among whites and black writers received widespread critical and popular recognition for the first time.

Countee Cullen (1903-46) and Langston Hughes were among the leading poets of the movement who helped to lay the foundations for the creative representation of an African American social and cultural reality in the modern world.

An essential figure in the development of African American literature was Richard Nathaniel Wright who reacted against the Harlem Renaissance’s Aestheticism and proposed that black writers should create works directly aimed
at ending racism. His novels, which are vivid portrayals of both the economic and psychological effects of racism on bitter and alienated black men, were compared to the naturalistic fiction of John Steinbeck. As a black writer he was a major protest voice not only through his novels but also through his lectures which aimed at arousing black consciousness.

In the 1950s and 1960s many writers were involved in the political movements of the period and thought that the role of the artist was that of enhancing racial, cultural and political awareness. The influence of Wright’s work can be detected in Ralph Ellison whose *Invisible Man* (1952) is a wonderful examination of racial repression and voices the need for individual self-awareness. The novel, however, is outstanding also for its brilliant use of inter-textual and cultural links which include, among others, Dante, Louis Armstrong, T. S. Eliot, and the language of slave auctions. In *Invisible Man* European and African American literature come together to chart a black man’s quest for his identity.

While the 1960s and 1970s were dominated by the Black Art movement, whose artists supported separatist politics and black Nationalism and were anti-white and anti-American, in the late 1970’s the Post Aesthetic movement put less emphasis on the disparity between the races and focused on self-reflection and healing. The literary output became more varied and African American literature became more articulate covering a variety of genres and themes. Women writers like Alice Walker focused on black society and addressed feminist themes and started to retrace the history of the black woman and her sufferings.

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**LANGSTON HUGHES** (1902–67)

**Life and Works**

Langston Hughes was born in Missouri and educated at Columbia University, New York, and Lincoln University, Pennsylvania. He had a nomadic life in the US and Europe and did a variety of odd jobs – a seaman, a doorman, a busboy, etc. His name is associated with the Harlem Renaissance, a literary movement that flourished in the 1920s and 1930s in the African American area of Harlem in New York. Hughes experimented with blues and jazz forms in his first volumes of poetry, *The Weary Blues* (1926) and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) because he viewed black music as the major form of art of his race: the poems are about black lower-class people and degraded aspects of black life. In the early 1930s Hughes moved toward the left in politics, a shift which is reflected in his poetry. In the 1940s and 1950s he gave public readings of his poems to the accompaniment of a jazz band: *Montage of a Dream Remembered* (1951) is a volume full of jazz effects, while *Ask Your Mama* (1961) was explicitly
written for a musical accompaniment. He wrote successfully in all literary forms—fiction, plays and autobiography. He produced also a series of ironical sketches (1950-63) in which a black character living in Harlem, Negro Simple, comments on life and exposes white dishonesty and injustice.

**Content and Themes** His work, which expresses a profound, uncompromised love of his race, depicts the lives of ordinary black people in the US within the contemporary urban context using forms that would speak to them because they are theirs.

**Style** In his attempt to draw upon black experiences and traditions undiluted by white elements, he composed in authentic dialect, adapting or transcribing the linguistic features of everyday black speech. He also widened the resources of American poetry by incorporating elements of African American music: he was the first to make the blues part of American literature.

**Fortune** He is regarded as the foremost poet of the Harlem Renaissance and one of the most representative African American writers. His work continues to appeal to a surprisingly wide audience.

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**RICHARD WRIGHT (1908-60)**

**Life and Works** Richard Wright’s life reads like a typical American success story as he passed from extreme poverty to wealth and fame. He was born of a poor family in Nanchez, Mississippi. After a very deprived childhood he moved to Memphis where he worked as an errand boy and in the meantime read voraciously. In 1927 he moved to Chicago escaping the segregation of the South, but the North disappointed him because he still felt discriminated against there. He joined the Communist party and worked as a literary adviser and press agent for the Negro Federal Theatre of Chicago. In 1937 he moved to New York. His *Blueprint for Negro Writing* came out in the “New Challenge”, a magazine of which he was co-editor. *Uncle Tom’s Children*, a collection of four novellas set in the South, came out in 1938 followed by *Native Son* (1940). Meanwhile he had become disillusioned with the Communist party and voiced his position in *I Tried To Be a Communist* in “Atlantic Monthly” in 1944. *Black Boy*, the autobiographical novel he published in 1945, is by some critics considered his masterpiece and influenced later writers such as Ellison (p. 17) and James Baldwin (1924-87). He was married twice to white women and in 1947 he moved to Paris where he stayed till the end of his life. He joined the literary circle of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86) and Albert Camus (1913-60), travelled extensively in Europe and Africa in the 1950s and continued writing. The *Outsider*, an existential novel, came out in 1953, followed by *Black Power: a Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (1954), *White Man Listen!* (1957), *The Long Dream* (1958). He died in Paris in 1960. The second part of his autobiography was published posthumously as *American Hunger* in 1977.

**Contents and Themes** Wright’s novels show the strong influence of the naturalist writers he had read widely, in particular Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945) and John Steinbeck. Their focus on violence broke the taboo of the conventional attitudes of black writers towards a white reading audience who did not want to be shocked. He strongly made the point that black people are part of the population of the United States but have been deprived of their inheritance.

**Style** He relies on very traditional narrative techniques and a clear prose because his aim is to reach large audiences. His works also have echoes of the Gothic tradition and of melodramatic aspects.

**Fortune** He was the first black writer to receive critical acclaim and commercial success. As a black writer he was a major protest voice not only through his novels but he also lectures. He was highly influential at the beginning of his career, but his fame declined when he was in Europe. *Black Boy* is still widely read and has become a classic of black literature.
RALPH ELLISON (1914-94)

Life and Works
The son of a small businessman, Ralph Waldo Ellison was born in Oklahoma City. He was a voracious reader and also developed a musical talent at an early age. He entered the Tuskegee Institute on a scholarship in 1933 to study music, but had to leave at the end of the junior year because of money problems. He moved to New York City and settled in Harlem where he met Langston Hughes (→ p. 14) and Richard Wright (→ p. 15) who was to have a major influence on his career as a writer. He became involved in the Federal Writers’ Project and wrote for the review “New Challenge”, edited by Wright. Still under Wright’s patronage, Ellison collected facts and folklore for books on the African American tradition. During World War I he worked as a cook in the Merchant Marine. He married in 1946. His first novel Invisible Man came out in 1952. Although now considered a literary masterpiece, it received mixed responses from the black community. Ellison was criticised by the Left for his ironic attack on the Communist party and both by the Civil Rights movement and the black Nationalists for his lack of political commitment. He lectured widely and taught at Bard College, the University of Chicago and New York University. His essays, reviews and criticism of art and music were published in Shadow and Act (1964). Further essays and stories were published in Going to the Territory (1986). He died of cancer in 1994. His second unfinished novel, Juneteenth, came out posthumously in 1999. The title refers to June 19, 1865 when Texas slaves were informed of their liberty.

Contents and Themes Though accepting the necessity for racial pride, he came to reject the concept of race as a literary issue; he considered it to be a limitation on true artistic talent. It was the plight of man in the 20th century that most interested him.

Style Ellison employs very sophisticated forms of narrative technique with a highly elaborate and figurative language. His style reveals the influence of European Modernism.

Fortune He was more influential as a critic than as a novelist. His views on race and art deeply influenced the concepts of ‘minority’ and ‘post-colonial’ literary criticism.

ALICE WALKER (b. 1944)

Life and Works
The eighth child of a poor black farmer in Georgia, Alice Walker had an accident at eight, which deprived her of sight in one eye; this episode made her develop an acute sensitivity for outcasts. She started writing very early, noting down her feelings. After graduating from Sarah Lawrence College, New York, she started teaching black literature in Mississippi and became active in the fight against black segregation. In 1967 she married a white Civil Rights lawyer, at a time when interracial marriage was still illegal in the South. In 1977 she was divorced and moved first to New York and then to San Francisco where she now lives. As well as a novelist and poet, she is highly regarded as an essayist and critic. She has held academic posts in various universities. A prolific writer, she has published several novels: her best-known is The Color Purple (1982), her latest is By the Light of My Father’s Smile (1998). Her poems are collected in Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling Poems: 1965-1990 (1991).

Contents and Themes Her works mostly deal with black society with a particular focus on the plight of women: family violence, racism, unemployment and sexism. To describe her feminist position she coined the term ‘womanism’ which is based on a folk African American word and is free of any sexist or racist implication.

Style The style of her novels reveals the influence of the oral tradition which she studied in depth starting from the earliest slave narratives.

Fortune She is highly popular both for her novels and her feminist writings. Steven Spielberg made a successful film adaptation of The Color Purple in 1985.
Melting Pot or Mosaic?

**OBJECTIVES**

In *Step Three* you will:

- analyse literary texts by writers from different ethnic communities – Native American, Asian American and Mexican American
- relate the texts to their cultural, social and political context
- compare texts to paintings
- compare and contrast the themes and issues that texts and paintings express

In recent years an increasing number of writers from ethnic groups other than African American have made a reputation for themselves in the US. Some are the children of immigrants or immigrants themselves, while others belong to the Native peoples who inhabited the land long before the arrival of European settlers. Some of these writers have assimilated into the mainstream culture of the US and uphold or criticise American values, while others have made ethnicity one of the main issues of their work.

The range of ethnic groups in the US is considerable. Besides the African Americans there are communities of Native Americans, Asian Americans, Jewish Americans, Italian Americans and Mexican Americans, to name a few. You are now going to read texts by writers who belong to three different ethnic groups: the Native Americans, the Asian Americans and the Mexican Americans. The texts are from works which were all published in the 80s. The sequence follows the chronology of the arrival of the related ethnic groups in the US.

**A Native American Voice**

We shall start from the ethnic community which inhabited North America long before the so called ‘birth’ of the US. The Native American voice is that of a woman writer.
LOUISE ERDRICH (b. 1954)

Love Medicine (1984)

Erdrich is of mixed blood, German on her father's side and Chippewa on her mother's side. The Chippewa were an Indian tribe who inhabited the Great Lakes region of North America. The novel Love Medicine covers a span of time from 1934 to 1984 and focuses on the lives of two Chippewa families, the Pillagers and the Kashpaws living in and around a Reservation in the fictional town of Argus, North Dakota.

Here is a brief summary of the novel.

SUMMARY

The novel is built around a small community of Indian characters, loosely connected, and a few events which are told in different ways by the different characters themselves in the first-person, though a third-person is also present. It is divided into 18 chapters, each with a title. The “love medicine” is forgiveness which makes possible a recovery of the self after loss and broken connections.

The extract below is taken from Chapter 13, which has the same title as the book.

1 Read the text and note down who the characters are, where they are and who narrates the events.

He hollered¹ and he yelled them² prayers, and I guess people was³ used to him by now, because they only muttered theirs and did not quit and gawk⁴ like I did. I was getting red-faced, I admit. I give him the elbow once or twice, but that wasn't nothing to him. He kept on. He shrieked to heaven and he pleaded like a movie actor and he pounded his chest like Tarzan in the Lord I Am Not Worthies. I thought he might hurt himself. Then after a while I guess I got used to it, and that's when I wondered: how come?

So afterwards I out and asked him. “How come? How come you yelled?”

“God don’t⁵ hear me otherwise,” said Grandpa Kashpaw.

I sweat. I broke right into a little cold sweat at my hairline because I knew this was perfectly right and for years not one damn other person had noticed it. God’s been going deaf. Since the Old Testament, God’s been deafening up on us. I read, see. Besides the dictionary, which I’m constantly in use of, I had this Bible once. I read it. I found there was⁶ discrepancies between then and now. It struck me. Here God used to raineth⁷ bread from clouds, smite the Phillipines⁸, sling fire down on red-light districts where people got stabbed. He even appeared in person every once in a while. God used to pay attention, is what I’m saying. Now there's your God in the Old Testament and there is Chippewa Gods as well. Indian Gods, good and bad, like tricky Nanabozho or the water monster,

---

1. hollered, shouted (urlò).
2. them, those.
3. was, were.
4. gawk, stare stupidly (restavano imbambolati).
5. don’t, doesn’t.
6. was, were.
7. to raineth, the child makes an infinitive of the old third-person singular used in the Bible, to rain.
8. Phillipines, Phillistines.
Misespehush, who lives over in Matchimanito. That water monster was the last God I ever heard to appear. It had a weakness for young girls and grabbed one of the Pillagers off her rowboat. She got to shore all right, but only after this monster had its way with her. She's an old lady now. Old Lady Pillager. She still doesn't like to see her family fish that lake.

Our Gods aren't perfect, is what I'm saying, but at least they come around. They'll do a favor if you ask them right. You don't have to yell. But you do have to know, like I said, how to ask in the right way. That makes problems, because to ask proper was an art that was lost to the Chippewa once the Catholics gained ground. Even now, I have to wonder if Higher Power turned it back, if we got to yell, or if we just don't speak its language.

I looked around me. How else could I explain what all I had seen in my short life — King smashing his fist in things, Gordie drinking himself down to the Bismarck hospitals, or Aunt June left by a white man to wander off in the snow. How else to explain the times my touch don't work, and farther back, to the old-time Indians who was swept away in the outright germ warfare and dirty-dog killing of the whites. In those times, us Indians was so much kindlier than now. We took them in.

Oh yes, I'm bitter as an old cutworm just thinking of how they done to us and doing still.

So Grandpa Kashpaw just opened my eyes a little there. Was there any sense relying on a God whose ears was stopped? Just like the government? I says then, right off, maybe we got nothing but ourselves. And that's not much, just personally speaking. I know I don't got the cold hard potatoes it takes to understand everything. Still, there's things I'd like to do. For instance, I'd like to help some people like my Grandpa and Grandma Kashpaw get back some happiness within the tail ends of their lives.

2 Read the text again.
In your notebook write down words and phrases that mark the steps of the child's growing awareness. Follow the guidelines below.

- Difference between the Catholic and the Chippewa/Indian religions
- Loss of contact with the Chippewa/Indian religion
- Change in Indian people's behaviour and character
- Recalling of past events
- Feelings derived from the recollection
- Resolution

3 Focus on the overall meaning.

a What would you say the grandfather's hollering is symbolic of?

- □  1 rage
- □  2 despair
- □  3 wish to assert identity
- □  4 Other (specify) .................

b Why is it a meaningful episode in the child's life?

c Can you see any connections between the child's intention and the title of the chapter?

9. my touch, it refers to the boy's healing powers (tocco risanatore).
10. germ warfare, it refers to the fact that many Indians die of illnesses caused by germs introduced by the whites.
11. us, we.
12. I don't got the cold hard potatoes, I've not got the brain (non ho la capacità).
4 Read Louise Erdrich’s biography (➔ p. 39) and say:
   - how far her Chippewa heritage has influenced her life
   - how the structure of her novel, Love Medicine, reflects traditional Indian culture.

The history of Native Americans is long and rich and their cultural heritage is still alive nowadays.

5 Read the Bookmark below and trace the facts and aspects which can shed light on the extract by Erdrich.

**Bookmark • Native Americans**

The term ‘Native Americans’ refers to peoples who are indigenous to the Americas. They are also known as Indians.

**EARLY POPULATION**
It is estimated that at the time of the first European contacts, North America was inhabited by about 10 million people, descendants from Asian peoples who migrated there some 30,000 years ago. Over the centuries indigenous peoples developed into a large number of tribes. Some were nomadic while others settled down and evolved under the influence of the areas in which they lived (➔ map). Social organization was largely based on the family and characterised by a religious dimension. Most Native Americans believe that in the universe there exists an Almighty or spiritual force that is the source of all forms of life.

**RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES**

Native Americans existed as a Nation before the United States and they signed treaties with colonial authorities and later with the US Government. But after the defeat at Wounded Knee in 1890 they were dispossessed of their land, confined in Reservations and forced to assimilate into the

_Seth Eastman, Indian Sugar Camp, engraving, Los Angeles, The Southwest Museum, c. 1830-50._
mainstream of US society. Only in 1924 did the US Congress grant Native Americans United States citizenship. Another milestone was the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 which restored Indian lands to tribal ownership. In the 1970s, Native Americans demanded and achieved greater authority over their own lives and Reservations.

● NATIVE AMERICANS TODAY
By the 1990 census the number of Native Americans was almost two million – 0.8 percent of the total US population. They mostly live on Reservations and take pride in their heritage. Tribal languages, religious ceremonies, native art and music are enjoying renewed vigor.

● ART AND PRIDE IN ETHNIC HERITAGE
The impact of Native American heritage shows in the work of the artist Patrick Deșjarlait (pronounced/deʒa:lɛ/1921-72) who declared that he felt “compelled to tell the story of my people through my paintings”. He was born into the Chippewa tribe and spent a year at the Chippewa Reservation.

Patrick Desjarlait, Maple Sugar Time, watercolour, Tulsa, Oklahoma, Philbrook Museum of Art, 1946.

The title refers to the time of the year when maple trees are tapped for their sweet sap which is boiled into delicious maple syrup. The painting shows five people who carry out different jobs to make maple syrup. Fires burn and blaze beneath the iron pots where the sap is boiling. The glow of the fire makes the people stand out against the dark trees in the background and lends the picture a feeling of warmth. The faces and the gestures look solemn and dignified. The painting is a modern version of ancient traditions, as the older engraving on p. 28 confirms.
The next extract is by an Asian American writer, Amy Tan.

**AMY TAN** (b. 1952)

**The Joy Luck Club** (1989)

1. Go through Tan’s biography card. Is her Asian descent a relevant aspect in her life?

**SUMMARY**

The novel tells the story of four Asian women who fled from China in the 1940s and of their four Americanised daughters. All the mothers had horrible experiences in their native land and all came to America with high hopes for the future of their daughters. But the daughters became strangers or antagonists to their mothers. The four mothers are connected through the Joy Luck Club, a group they have founded to meet and play mah jong, a Chinese game.

The extract is taken from Part three of the book whose title is *American Translation*. Waverley is one of the four Chinese American daughters of the novel: she is a divorcée with a little girl called Soshana. In the extract she takes her future second husband, Rich, to meet her family. Rich is an American.

2. As you read the text make a list of Rich’s cultural mistakes during the evening.

Rich was not only not Chinese, he was a few years younger than I was. And unfortunately, he looked much younger with his curly red hair, smooth pale skin, and the splash of orange freckles across his nose. He was a bit on the short side, compactly built. In his dark business suits, he looked nice but easily forgettable, like somebody’s nephew at a funeral. Which was why I didn’t notice him the first year we worked together at the firm. But my mother noticed everything.

“So what do you think of Rich?” I finally asked, holding my breath.

She tossed the eggplant in the hot oil and it made a loud, angry hissing sound. “So many spots on his face,” she said.

I could feel the pinpricks\(^1\) on my back. “They’re freckles. Freckles are good luck, you know,” I said a bit too heatedly in trying to raise my voice above the din of the kitchen.

“Oh?” she said innocently.

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1. *pinpricks*, annoying sensation (sensazione di fastidio).
"Yes, the more spots the better. Everybody knows that."
She considered this a moment and then smiled and spoke in Chinese:
"Maybe this is true. When you were young, you got the chicken pox. So many spots, you had to stay home for ten days. So lucky, you thought."

I couldn’t save Rich in the kitchen. And I couldn’t save him later at the dinner table.

20 He had brought a bottle of French wine, something he did not know my parents could not appreciate. My parents did not even own wineglasses. And then he also made the mistake of drinking not one but two frosted glasses full, while everybody else had a half-inch “just for taste.”

When I offered Rich a fork, he insisted on using the slippery ivory chopsticks. He held them splayed² like the knock-kneed³ legs of an ostrich while picking up a large chunk⁴ of sauce-coated eggplant. Halfway between his plate and his open mouth, the chunk fell on his crisp white shirt and then slid into his crotch⁵. It took several minutes to get Shoshana to stop shrieking with laughter.

And then he had helped himself to big portions of the shrimp and snow peas, not realizing he should have taken only a polite spoonful, until everybody had had a morsel.

He had declined the sautéed new greens, the tender and expensive leaves of bean plants plucked⁶ before the sprouts turn into beans. And Shoshana refused to eat them also, pointing to Rich: “He didn’t eat them! He didn’t eat them!”

He thought that he was being polite by refusing seconds, when he should have followed my father’s example, who made a big show of taking small portions of seconds, thirds, and even fourths, always saying he could not resist another bite of something or other, and then groaning⁷ that he was so full he thought he would burst.

But the worst was when Rich criticized my mother’s cooking, and he didn’t even know what he had done. As is the Chinese cook’s custom, my mother always made disparaging⁸ remarks about her own cooking. That night she chose to direct it toward her famous steamed pork and preserved vegetable dish, which she always served with special pride.

“Ai! This dish not salty enough, no flavor,” she complained, after tasting a small bite. “It is too bad to eat.”

This was our family’s cue to eat some and proclaim it the best she had ever made. But before we could do so, Rich said, “You know, all it needs is a little soy sauce.” And he proceeded to pour a riverful of the salty black stuff on the platter, right before my mother’s horrified eyes.

And even though I was hoping throughout the dinner that my mother would somehow see Rich’s kindness, his sense of humor and boyish charm, I knew he had failed miserably in her eyes.

². *splayed*, wide apart (divaricati).
³. *knock-kneed*, legs with the knees that touch (valghe).
⁴. *chunk*, piece (pezzo).
⁵. *crotch*, place where legs join (cavallo dei pantaloni).
⁶. *plucked*, gathered (raccolti).
⁷. *groaning*, complaining (lamentandosi).
⁸. *disparaging*, contemptuous (sprezzanti).
Rich obviously had had a different opinion on how the evening had gone. When we got home that night, after we put Shoshana to bed, he said modestly, “Well. I think we hit it off. A-o-kay.” He had the look of a dalmatian, panting, loyal, waiting to be petted...

“Uh-hmm,” I said. I was putting on an old nightgown, a hint that I was not feeling amorous. I was still shuddering, remembering how Rich had firmly shaken both my parents’ hands with that same easy familiarity he used with nervous new clients. “Linda, Tim,” he said, “we’ll see you again soon, I’m sure.”

My parents’ names are Lindo and Tin Jong, and nobody, except a few older family friends, ever calls them by their first names.

(An Italian translation is Il circolo della fortuna e della felicità, translated by M. Castino Bado, Milano, Rizzoli, 1989)

3 Focus on Waverley and Rich.
a Waverley feels caught between two worlds.
1 Underline the parts that best reveal her feelings. What is her relationship with her mother like?
Support your answer with evidence from the text.
2 How would you describe Waverley’s state of mind?
b Rich’s personality is clearly revealed. What major traits are shown in the extract?

The extract from The Joy Luck Club deals with bicultural experiences and shows that it is not easy to grow up Chinese in the US. Bicultural people are often torn between the values and practices of their own culture and the values and practices of the mainstream. They may be forced to choose between retaining their ethnic identity and rejecting it.

4 Read the Bookmark.
a Which information in the Bookmark sheds light on the extract by Amy Tan?
b Artists can also engage with the issues of assimilation or acculturation. How does the painting compare with the extract?
c What issues can immigration give rise to?

Bookmark Asian Americans

By 1990 the US was home to nearly 7 million Asian Americans. The Chinese were the largest group, being more than 1.6 million.

EARLY ARRIVALS
The first Asian immigrants came from China in the second half of the 19th century, seeking to improve their economic condition. Many were recruited in 1866 from rural districts in China to work on the building of the Pacific railroad. They were subjected to discrimination as they were considered competitors for jobs. As a consequence, in 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act banned further immigration and was renewed in the early 20th century when it was extended to other Asian immigrants as well.

9. hit it off, got along well together (siamo stati bene insieme).
ASIAN IMMIGRATION IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY
Shortage of labour during the two World Wars brought an easing of immigration restrictions and once more opened the doors to the Chinese as well as to the Japanese and Koreans. Chinese immigrants created small outposts of their own within American cities. These communities came to be known as Chinatowns and sprang up in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, Boston and other big cities. There, Chinese immigrants could find friends and relations who shared their culture, tradition, hopes for the future and hardships.

ASIAN IMMIGRATION IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY
The Immigration Act (1965) allowed the entrance of a large group of Asian immigrants, which included highly educated people seeking greater opportunities in the US. By the 1980s Asians were arriving in great numbers, especially from Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and the Philippines. Many of them were refugees, including the Vietnamese who were driven from their homes at the end of the Vietnam War.

ASIAN AMERICANS TODAY
Many Asian Americans found adjustment to the very different American culture extremely difficult. The older generations in particular suffered from disorientation and discrimination while their children adapted to the new country more rapidly; this caused changes, and often incomprehension, in their relationships with their parents. A stereotyped view of Asian Americans presents them as excelling in academic studies, especially in science and mathematics, and as successful workers with higher incomes than the average family. This has often caused resentment and discrimination among the Americans who fear their competition.
In the course of the Module you have come across these key words: ethnic, heritage, culture, race, assimilation. It is important for you to know their exact meaning.

Discuss their meanings with one of your classmates and agree about a possible definition for each term. Then check the correctness of your definitions against the Bookmark below.

**Bookmark**  
**Key Terms**

- **Assimilation**: The process by which individuals or groups are absorbed into and adopt the dominant culture and society of another group. The term ‘assimilation’ is generally used with regard to immigrants to a new land. New customs and attitudes are acquired through contact and communication with indigenous inhabitants.

- **Culture**: The system of art, thought and customs of a particular group or Nation.

- **Ethnic**: Deriving originally from *ethnos* ('nation' or 'people'), ethnic refers to any social group bound together by race, customs, language, values, etc. It is used to indicate any visible minority in a Western culture.

- **Heritage**: Something that is inherited from earlier generations; tradition.

- **Race**: A human population sharing certain common hereditary physical features (e.g. colour of skin, colour and type of hair, shape of eyes and nose). Race differs from ethnicity in that race is a biological phenomenon whereas ethnicity is a sociological concept.

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**A Mexican American Voice**

**GARY SOTO**  
(b. 1952)  
➔ BIography, p. 40

**Mexicans Begin Jogging**  
(1981)

Gary Soto is a Chicano poet, that is to say a poet of Mexican origin. The poem *Mexicans Begin Jogging* appeared originally in the collection *Where Sparrows Work Hard*, 1981. It describes an incident that occurred when Soto (a Mexican American) worked in a factory where illegal Mexican workers were employed.

1 Read the text.

- What happened when the border patrol raided the factory?
- Soto shouted to the boss that he was American. Why didn’t the boss believe him? What was Soto forced to do?
Mexicans Begin Jogging

At the factory I worked
In the fleck\(^1\) of rubber, under the press
Of an oven yellow with flame,
Until the border patrol opened

Their vans and my boss waved for us to run.
“Over the fence, Soto,” he shouted,
And I shouted that I was an American.
“No time for lies,” he said, and passes
A dollar in my palm, hurrying me

Through the back door.

Since I was on his time\(^2\), I ran
And became the wag\(^3\) to a short tail of Mexicans —
Ran past the amazed crowds that lined
The street and blurred like photographs, in rain.

I ran from that industrial road to the soft
Houses where people paled at the turn of an autumn sky.
What could I do but yell vivas\(^4\)
To baseball, milkshakes, and those sociologists
Who would clock me

As I jog\(^5\) into the next century
On the power of a great, silly grin.

**UPDATE**
Have you ever heard of illegal workers in your country? What are the causes behind their presence? How are they looked upon by people in general?

2 In the second part Soto is described running through a white area.
   a How did the “crowds” of the “soft houses” react to the arrival of the Mexican workers?
   b Consider three quotes from the poem: “vivas ... baseball, milkshakes”.
      1 To which heritage do they belong?
      2 Soto salutes the white people in Spanish embracing the symbols of America. What is the meaning of his gesture?

3 Consider the final comment on the sociologist for whom the speaker is just a number in the assimilation process. Is it in tune with his gesture? Has it got any link with the title?

4 Now turn to the form of the poem. What are its main features?

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1. *fleck*, here means a lot of rubber particles in the air (pulviscolo di particelle di gomma).
2. *I was on his time*, the sentence refers to the fact that the man is his boss and the boss’s time is precious in terms of money and can’t be wasted (gli stavo facendo perdere tempo).
3. *wag*, is the movement a dog makes with its tail when it is happy. Here it means that he joined in at the end of the line of Mexicans running away from the factory. He is probably using the term to reinforce the subserviance of Mexicans to the factory boss (a dog with a wagging tail means a servant trying to please master) (scodinzolamento).
4. *vivas*, Spanish for hooray, usually used to say that you approve of something (evviva).
5. *jog*, the term refers to a leisure activity in which you run slowly and steadily. The speaker is actually running through the residential neighbourhood, not jogging (faccio jogging).
The Bookmark below offers essential information about the history and characteristics of the Chicano community Soto belongs to.

Study the Bookmark.

Identify the main aspects of Mexican immigration to the US and write them down in tabular form.

Single out those aspects which link with Soto’s poem and life (➡ Biography, p. 40).

**Bookmark**  
**Mexican Americans**

Mexican Americans are residents of the United States who trace their ancestry to Mexico.

Mexican Americans are also known as Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Mex-Americans.

**MEXICAN IMMIGRATION TO THE US**

About 90 per cent of the Mexican American population today migrated from impoverished rural regions of northern Mexico during the 20th century. One of the main periods of immigration occurred between 1912 and 1920 when large numbers of rural farmers, known as *campesinos*, fled to the US to escape political turmoil in Mexico.

A second period of immigration started during World War II, when the American Government allowed more than 4 million manual laborers to enter the country to replace American workers who had joined the armed forces.

**THE MEXICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY TODAY**

Mexican Americans constitute the largest group of Hispanic Americans. According to the 1990 US census, approximately 13.5 million people are Mexican Americans.

Poverty has long been a problem for the Mexican American community leading to riots and conflicts in the 40s. During the 1960s the so-called ‘Chicano movement’ started a campaign to secure Civil Rights and economic opportunity for the community.

Unlike members of many other immigrant groups, most second- and third-generation Mexican Americans maintain their first language (Spanish) which is not only a leading world language but also an important unifying force for communities. English is generally used in the public sphere, Spanish at home. Most Mexican Americans are Roman Catholics.

**ART AND ETHNIC IDENTITY**

In the painting *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe* (➡ p. 37) the Chicana artist López (b. 1942) questions the traditional image of the ideal woman in Chicano culture and creates a modern female model who has new roles to fulfil. Her portrait is a homage to the working class, self assertive woman.

As a Chicana growing up in California, López is aware that for women artists from the ethnic minorities “ethnicity more than gender has shaped their primary identities, loyalties and often the content of their art.”

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* Over the decades, Mexican American Spanish has been so heavily influenced by English that many refer to it as ‘Spanglish’, a combination of Spanish and English.

The US has often been described as a ‘melting pot’ in which races blend into one culture and nation. The short extract from the newspaper “Washington Post” makes a point about the present status of an American melting pot.

**Read the text and summarise its content.**

**Document**


“Not only are the demographics of the United States changing in profound and unprecedented ways, but so too are the very notions of assimilation and the melting pot that have been article of faith in the
American self-image for generations. *E Pluribus Unum* (‘From Many, One’) remains the national motto, but there no longer seems to be a consensus about what that should mean. (…) American culture remains a powerful force – for better or worse – that influences people both here and around the world in countless ways. But several factors have combined in recent years to allow immigrants to resist, if they choose, the Americanization that had once been considered irresistible. In fact, the very concept of assimilation is being called into question as never before (…) Even the metaphor itself is changing having fallen out of fashion completely with many immigration advocacy and ethnic groups. They prefer such terms as the ‘salad bowl’ and the ‘mosaic’, metaphors that convey more of a sense of separateness in describing this nation of immigrants.”

2 In a ‘salad bowl’ all the vegetable ingredients remain separate and clearly visible. What does this metaphor aim to communicate?

3 Think of the literary and visual texts included in this Module. Can you find examples that support the journalist’s statements?

Yolanda M. López, *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe*, oil pastel on paper, collection of the artist, 1978. The picture is one of a set of three portraits depicting the artist, her mother, and her grandmother. It is a reinterpretation of the image of ‘Our Lady of Guadalupe’, traditionally venerated amongst Mexican Catholics: the Virgin looks like a young Chicana, a vigorous smiling woman with a star-covered mantle striding forward in running shoes.

**STUDY BOX**

**Redefining American Identity**

Choose three texts, one from each Step of the Module. For each text make appropriate notes under the headings below.

- **Traits of ethnic identity:** *identify the elements which characterise the ethnic group in each text.*
- **Type of conflict:** *describe the type of conflict (if any) between the dominant culture and the ethnic culture.*
- **The central character and his/her ethnic identity:** *consider to what extent the main character (or the group) maintains or loses his/her cultural identity.*
- **Generation gap:** *discuss the tensions (if any) between generations resulting from differences in experiences, memories, points of view, etc.*
- **The conflict and the social/historical background:** *identify reasons for the conflict in relation to the social/historical background (➔ Bookmarks and Biographies which are part of the Step).*

The texts in this Step give voice to people who were, for a long period, left outside the mainstream of American life and culture. They also displace the myth that there is a single identity called ‘American’ which is settled once for all. The three works included here are representative of the pluralistic play of voices which is distinctive of 20th-century American literature.
In the US most writers with varied national and cultural heritages question the issue of American identity as a desirable ‘melting pot’ of races and ethnic communities and stress the presence of racial/cultural conflicts within the country – a result of the complex intersections among many peoples, cultures and languages within the same rational borders.

Conflict, often in a violent form, is part of the social historical background to most ethnic communities. The history of their past includes, for example, the decimation and segregation of Native Americans, the exclusion of Asian Americans, the exploitation of Mexican Americans (Bookmarks pp. 28, 32, 36).

Nowadays the sense of conflict is to be found in the uncomfortable position of being caught between two worlds.

In Love Medicine, Erdrich voices her double consciousness as both American and Native American, but her specific history as a Chippewa drives her to assert her rich heritage and recover her cultural connections of which she feels proud. Native art parallels literature in the recovery and celebration of one’s roots as the painting Maple Sugar Time shows (p. 29).

In literary works and paintings from the multiethnic American scene there are also characters who are critical of how mainstream US society responds to immigrants (Y. Soon Min, Make Me, p. 33). On the other hand, it is not easy to manage the demands of one’s community when they do not fit into American mainstream culture as the protagonists of The Joy Luck Club show.

Writers like Soto or artists like López seem to look upon America with a touch of irony and/or from the perspective of their heritage whether this means the native Spanish language or the traditional image of ‘Our Lady of Guadalupe’ (p. 37).

Nowadays multiethnic literature seems to welcome the idea of American identity as a ‘salad bowl’ or mosaic within which each community retains its specific rich heritage. At the same time, more and more space is being given to the works of authors from various cultures in books devoted to surveys of American literature.
LOUISE ERDRICH (b. 1954)

Life and Works

Louise Erdrich was born in North Dakota of an Indian Chippewa mother and a father of German origin. Both her mother and father worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and she grew up in a small town near the Reservation her mother came from. After graduating she took up creative writing at the John Hopkins University. She began writing poetry but then turned to fiction because it gave her more scope for story telling and passing on cultural memories through fables and folklore. Her first collection of poems Jacklight was published in 1984, the same year in which Love Medicine appeared. This novel, together with The Beet Queen (1986), Tracks (1988) and The Bingo Palace (1994), forms a series of four connected works which cover three generations of Native Americans and European immigrant families and chronicle the history of the Chippewa tribe to which Erdrich belongs. Her next novel Tales of Burning Love (1996), though not a sequel to the previous series, is still set on a Reservation. Her latest novel is Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse (2001).

Content, Themes and Style

All of Erdrich’s fiction draws on ethnic roots and ethnic awareness, but she recognises her debt to Faulkner both for her regional outlook and her narrative technique. Her novels are often about the clash between Native and European American cultures and are nearly always set against the harsh landscape of the Great Plains, in the Reservation setting. Her novels have a spoken, storytelling quality. In Love Medicine the unifying element and the theme of the novel are to be found in the storytelling itself through which characters share their experience. Her work is also marked by a marvelous sense of comic invention and irony.

Fortune

She is regarded as one of the best known Native American writers in the country. Though she is sometimes seen as a political figure by some critics, she does not intend her writings to be a vehicle for her own political beliefs.

AMY TAN (b. 1952)

Life and Works

Amy Tan was born in California of Chinese parents. As an Asian, she was made to feel like an outsider: she was made to feel deeply unhappy with her Chinese appearance and to reject her cultural past. Amy Tan completed her education and gained a BA in English and a MA in Linguistics. She started work as a business writer, but when her mother fell ill, she abandoned her job and turned to creative writing in order to come to terms with her divided culture.

The Joy Luck Club (1989) was her first publication, followed by The Kitchen God’s Wife (1991), in which she focuses on the mother-daughter relationship, and The Hundred Secret Senses (1995), in which she contrasts the Chinese past and the American present. Her latest novel The Bonesetter’s Daughter (2001), is the most personal of her books.

Content, Themes and Style

Amy Tan’s fiction is based on her background and experience of a divided self between two culture. She objects to the label ‘ethnic writer’ because she finds it reductive. Though all her works deal with themes of identity and heritage, they transcend the immigrant experience and become paradigms of the human condition in general. She is much admired for her rich figurative language which draws on the imagery of two different cultures.

Fortune

She is regarded as the leading name of Asian American novelists.
GARY SOTO (b. 1952)

Life and Works

Content, Themes and Style
Soto is a working-class poet and fiction writer and his work is mostly based on his autobiographical experiences: his memories from his childhood in a poor Mexican American community, as a field and factory worker, his own family members are the core of his writing. He deals with mostly economically disadvantaged people and with the kind of problems that many Mexican American families experienced. His sympathies for the plight of farm workers and the urban poor are typical of contemporary writers from his ethnic background. He writes largely in autobiographical or confessional mode, uses free verse with effective enjambed lines, introduces vivid and detailed images drawn from ordinary experience and mixes Spanish and Mexican words with English.

Fortune
Soto is considered one of the best Chicano poets of his time with a wide cultural background. As an autobiographical poet, he can be compared to Robert Lowell (1917-77) and Sylvia Plath, while his working-class sensibility echoes that of Philip Levine (b. 1928). His celebration of Chicano life and values is reminiscent of other Chicano poets such as Lorna Dee Cervantes (b. 1954). Although Soto is a Chicano poet, the content and style of his work has gained him a broad American audience. His volumes of both poetry and fiction have been granted several awards and prizes.
In this Module you have examined literary texts by authors of different ethnic origin and considered themes and issue related to a multiethnic society.

1 Choose three authors, one from each Step of the Module and prepare a report following the outline below.

- First introduce the topic of multiethnic society.
- then compare/contrast the works by the three writers you have chosen.
- finally, conclude your talk by outlining what view of multiethnic society seems to prevail in the works under discussion (you can refer to the document Immigrants Shunning Idea of Assimilation, p. 36 if you wish).

Here are a few possible guidelines you may refer to in the organisation of your comparison/contrast activity.

1 Data
   - Name of racial/ethnic group: ................
   - Writer: ................
   - Work (title and date): ................

2 The work
   a) Is the text based on the author’s personal experience?
   b) What is the central characters’ attitude to their own original cultural heritage? (pride, acceptance, shame, recovery of identity, etc.)
   c) Is there any evidence in the text of a conflict between other cultures and the cultural heritage of the central characters? What does the conflict most directly concern?
   d) What kind of relationship is there between different generations of the same ethnic group?
   e) Which key words from the extract best summarise what the text aims to communicate? (Do not mention more than three).

3 The background
   What links can you establish between the work, the writer and his/her background?

Keys

M1
p. 3 Lead in: 1. the United States E; Ghana I; Argentina E; Great Britain E; Bangladesh I; Albania I; Canada E; The Philippines I; India I; Australia E; Switzerland E; Germany E; Nigeria I; Croatia I; Belgium E; France E; Romania I; Brasil E.
Beyond Literature

THE JOY LUCK CLUB (1993)
directed by Wayne Wang, starring Tamlyn Tomita as Waverley, Christopher Rich as Rich, Tsai Chin as Waverley’s mother and Ya Shan Wu as Waverley’s father

You are going to watch the scene you have read from the book (↩ p. 30).

1 (FIRST VIEWING) Watch the clip and answer the questions.
   a Are Waverley and Rich the only guests for dinner?
   b Are people dressed in a western or eastern fashion?
   c Are the men wearing a jacket during dinner?
   d What can we see Rich doing during dinner?
   e Who is the narrator?

2 (SECOND VIEWING) Watch and focus on characters and humour.
   a Associate characters with the following feelings/attitudes and explain when they are apparent in the sequence.
     - hopeful
     - critical
     - kind
     - disappointed
     - horrified
     - enthusiastic
     - clumsy
     - cold
   b What kind of humour is present in the clip?
     - verbal
     - behavioural
     - situational

In the film a voice is heard which is not part of the dialogue. This convention is called voice-over and can have several functions. It can be used to:
- narrate part of the story;
- comment on the images on the screen;
- express a character’s inner feelings;
- give information on the action going on.
You should also remember that in films there is often an interaction of images and speeches which can produce one of the following effects:
- images are parallel with the speech when they express the same content;
- images are a counterpoint to the speech when they express a content which is in contrast with the speech;
- images are symbolic when they express an idea which is suggested by the speech.

3 (THIRD VIEWING) Watch again carefully.
   a Which function of those listed above do you think the voice-over fulfills in the sequence?
   b Add the following stage directions in the script below. Write the numbers where appropriate.
     1 (Rich helps himself to a lot of shrimps)
     2 (Rich pours soy sauce on a dish)
     3 (Rich drinks a full glass of wine)
     4 (Rich uses chopsticks clumsily and drops a shrimp)
   c What kind of interaction is there between the images on the screen and what the voice-over says?
Waverley  And Ma, this is Rich.
Rich  Great to meet you. Boys something smells wonderful. I guess we
came to the right place. You know Waverley has been telling me
that you are the best cook.
Waverley  I think maybe we got her.
Mother  So many spots on his face.
Narrator  Of course, the night was still young. Thank God, I had already
prepped him on the amity toast of Chinese manners
Father  *(Chinese toast)*
Narrator  Actually there were a few things I forgot to mention.
Rich  Let me make a toast.
Narrator  He shouldn’t have had that second glass when everyone had had
half an inch just ‘for taste’.
Rich  Shrimp, my favourite.
Narrator  He should have taken only a small spoonful of the best dish until
everyone had had a helping.
Mother  He has good appetite.
Narrator  He shouldn’t have bragged he was a fast learner.
But the worst was when Rich criticised my mother’s cooking, then he didn’t even know what he had
done. As is the Chinese cook’s custom, my mother always insults her own cooking but only with the
dishes she serves with special pride.
Mother  This dish not salty enough, no flavor. It’s too bad to eat, but please.
Narrator  That was her cue to eat some and proclaim it the best she had ever made.
Rich  You know, all it needs is a little soy sauce.

4  With the help of the script compare the clip and the text on p. 30.
Give at least one example of change and omission in the film script.

5  After watching the clip, write a short caption to each picture below.
THE MIGRATION SERIES  (1940-41)

Jacob Lawrence, tempera on gesso on composition board, 30.5 × 45.7 cm, New York, The Museum of Modern Art. “The migrants arrived in great numbers”. Number forty from a series of sixty panels

You are going to explore some connections between literature and art, in particular between Langston Hughes’ poem Po’ Boy Blues (p. 14) and a painting by Jacob Lawrence (Biography on the opposite page). Both the poet and the artist are African American, that is, of the same race, from a similar social background and the two works under discussion belong to roughly the same period of time.

Lawrence’s painting is panel number forty from a series of sixty done in 1940-41 and collectively entitled The Migration of the Negro. It tells a story based on the Lawrence family’s experience during the Great Migration (1913-46) – the exodus of millions of African Americans, including the artist’s parents, who left the rural South to work in the industrial cities of the Northern United States. Lawrence’s work explores the experiences of the people who migrated, as well as the political and economic reasons for their migration. Each panel is numbered and has its own small text heading added by the artist himself (above).

1 Let’s explore the connections starting with the subject matter.

a. Look carefully at the painting and read its heading. What does the panel show?

b. Go back to the poem by Hughes. What do the “po’ boy” of the poem and the people in the panel have in common?
In his artwork the artist has used **tempera** paint, suitable for painting flat shapes like the ones in the panel.

The colours are bright, bold and are a major element of Lawrence’s visual language. **Colours** have great importance in art: an understanding of colour and the effects of colour in different combinations is essential to the good reading of a painting. Artists use and group colours for artistic reasons but also to make a point, to produce particular feelings or reactions.

2 **Consider the panel and the poem.**

   **a** Look at the colouring of the panel.
   1 What colours have been used? 3 Does the artist reuse colours?
   2 How are they grouped? To what effect?

   **b** What similarities do you notice between the panel and the poem in the use of visual/verbal language (for verbal language 🌟 ex. 2, p. 15)?

3 **Colours also express feelings and moods or affect the way the viewer feels.**

   **a** What kind of feeling/s does Lawrence’s panel manage to convey?
   
   You can choose from the following:
   1 a sense of something frantic and inevitable 3 a sense of displacement, despair
   2 a sense of loss of something vital 4 Other (specify) ........

   **b** Does Hughes’ poem produce a similar effect?

4 **Analyse your response to the two works.**

   What do you think the painter’s and the poet’s aims are?

If you set out to compare a literary text and a visual text, you can work at different levels:

- **subject matter:** are they about the same subject?
- **theme:** do they express the same theme?
- **mood:** do they create a similar mood?
- **the context:** do they express similar or different responses to the same historical or cultural events?
- **use of verbal / visual language:** do they achieve similar results through different media (words and images)?
- **writer’s / artist’s aim:** have the writer and the artist got a similar aim?
- **reader’s / viewer’s response:** do they arouse similar responses in the reader and the viewer?

5 What levels have you explored in your comparison between Hughes’ poem and Lawrence’s panel?

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**BIOGRAPHY**

**JACOB LAWRENCE (1917-2000)**

Jacob Lawrence was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, but grew up in Harlem, New York, during the Depression. He studied art at the Harlem Community Art Center and learnt about African art and history. At the age of 23 he began his best-known narrative painting series, *The Migration of the Negro*, which made him an ‘overnight success’.

One of the most influential African American figurative artists, he has continued to draw upon black history for his subjects, portraying the lives, aspirations and struggles of black Americans.
NOBODY KNOWS DE TROUBLE I SEE
Anonymous, sung by Mahalia Jackson

You are now going to listen to a spiritual, one of the first expressions of the African American oral tradition ( Bookmark *Black Society in the US*, p. 12).

The spiritual emerged at the very beginning of the Colonial Period as a cry to God from black people to help them endure the hardships of their lives. It also showed how the Christian religion could serve as a useful tool in the colonisation of black people.

The Christian ideas of humility, mortification and resignation, in enabling the slaves to find ‘meaning’ in their ‘troubles’, reinforced the need for obedience to their masters and thereby dispelled the danger of rebellion.

Spirituals, like all works belonging to the oral tradition, usually exist in a variety of versions sung to the same tune.

You are going to listen to one of the many versions of this spiritual. It is sung by a famous black singer, Mahalia Jackson ( Biography, p. 47).

1 **(FIRST LISTENING) Read the text and listen to the tape.**

- What is the subject matter of the text?
- What feelings does it express?

Nobody knows de trouble I see,
Nobody knows but Jesus;
Nobody knows de trouble I see,
Glory, hallelujah!

Sometimes I’m standing crying,
Tears rolling down my face.
I implored the Lord Almighty
Help me from disgrace.

Oh Lord you know I have trials,
And so many pains and woe.
I have faith and comfort,
Help me to carry my heavy load

Nobody knows de trouble I see,
Nobody knows but Jesus;
Nobody knows de trouble I see,
Glory, hallelujah!

2 (SECOND LISTENING) This interpretation can be divided into two different parts. Listen again and do the following activities.

a Mark with a stroke at the side of the text where the division falls.

b Describe the difference between the first and second part. You may use some of the words and phrases below.

- faster/slower rhythm
- melody clearly recognisable/melody transformed by embellishments and variations
- singing accompanied by the organ/piano/drums/bass

3 (THIRD LISTENING) Listen again. Say to which parts of the performance the following descriptions apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sad and poignant tone</td>
<td>regular rhythm beaten by the drums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use of syncopation</td>
<td>3 use of syncopation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dialogue between voice and organ</td>
<td>4 dialogue between voice and organ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 predominance of the piano
6 dramatic tone of the voice

4 How far is improvisation significant in this interpretation?

(➔ p. 13)
BIOGRAPHY

MAHALIA JACKSON (1911-72)
The daughter of a church minister and the third of six children, she was born in New Orleans in 1911. She started her singing career at the age of four in the church choir. She had an irregular education and in 1935 she moved to Chicago where she married and opened a beauty and flower shop. She was ‘discovered’ by a record producer in church and soon attracted large audiences as a singer of spirituals. An activist of Martin Luther King’s Civil Rights movement

Multiethnic Voices and Issues in Great Britain and the United States

■ HISTORICAL NOTES (GB) British society has long been multicultural through the continuous immigration from Commonwealth countries which reached its peak in the 50s and early 60s. Writers, who are often first or second generation immigrants, are led to explore cross-cultural relationships and to express their view of British life. The presence of multiethnic voices in the literary output of contemporary Great Britain has attracted the attention of both the reading public and of critics.

■ BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH is a leading name of Black British poetry. Together with Linton Kwesi Johnson in the 1980s he set the trend for dub poetry - a type of poetry which has its roots in Jamaica and is characterised by a strong beat. It is often political, it can combine with music and be performed before an audience with which the poet establishes a close relationship. The language is not standard English – it is a mixture of English and Jamaican where the spelling conforms to phonetics.

■ THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA BY HANIF KUREISHI tells the story of a seventeen-year-old Londoner (born to an English mother and Indian father), his individual growth and self-discovery. The protagonist and narrator, Karim comes of age in the course of the novel which also deals with issues such as racism, immigration and economic success while maintaining a tone of irreverent humour.

■ HISTORICAL NOTES (USA) Before the Civil War (1859-65) there were few free black people and the great majority lived in the south as slaves. The abolitionist movement developed in the North and led to the Civil War which abolished slavery but the emancipation of black people was hindered in the South by racism and segregation, enforced by intimidating groups like the Ku Klux Klan. The Great Migration (1913-46) to the North and the Negro Renaissance in the 1920s were two of the first responses to social discrimination. The Niagara Movement fought for de-segregation, while the back-to Africa Movement advocated the return to Africa. In the mid-1950s the civil rights movement, under the leadership of Martin Luther King (1929-68) fought for civil rights through a policy of non-violence, while the Black Power movement in the 1960s, whose main leader was Malcolm X, advocated complete withdrawal from Western society.

■ LANGSTON HUGHES (1902-67) drew his inspiration from the oral tradition and the blues in particular. He was one of the leading poets of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement which developed mainly in the area of Harlem (in New York City) and was an outlet for racial pride and self-assertion.

■ RICHARD WRIGHT (1908-60) was a major protest voice. He was involved in the political movements of the period and thought that the role of the artist was that of enhancing racial, cultural and political awareness.

■ RALPH ELLISON (1914-94) analyses the results of racial repression and voices the need for individual self-awareness. However he did not share Wright’s political commitment in fiction and was more interested in narrative technique. Invisible Man brings together European and African American tradition.

■ ALICE WALKER focuses on black society and addresses feminist themes retracing the history of the black woman and her sufferings.

■ NEW WRITERS from a wide range of other ethnic groups than African American are making a reputation in the US. They question the issue of American identity as a melting pot of races and communities and emphasise the complex intersections among several peoples and cultures coexisting within the same country. They welcome the idea of American identity as a mosaic or salad bowl within which each group keeps its own specific traits. The multiethnic voices in the US can derive, for example, from the Native Americans, like the novelist Louise Erdrich who in Love Medicine recovers the vitality of her heritage. Or they may come from a Chinese background, like Ami Tan and her novel The Joy Luck Club in which she expresses the difficulty of being torn between one’s ethnic culture and the dominant culture. Mexican American writers such as the poet Gary Soto look upon America with a touch of irony and don’t feel inferior in the face of the dominant culture. Multiethnic art conveys the same variety of voices and attitudes as multiethnic literature.
VOICES FROM GREAT BRITAIN

1 Make notes or speak about the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* by referring to the following topics.

- story content
- protagonist
- narrator
- language and tone
- humour
- common ground between novel and author’s biography

2 Here is a list of lines written in jumbled order from Zephaniah’s poems included in the Step: *Independence, Acts of Parliament: motion 2*. Group the lines under their appropriate title and for each poem identify which are the opening and final lines. Then answer the questions written below the list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) “And that was nothing”</td>
<td>h) “And if you are visualistic”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) “That little piece of sun is ours”</td>
<td>i) “Dis land is ours”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) “And nobody kept saying something”</td>
<td>j) “And asking you no favours”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) “What is your bank?”</td>
<td>k) “No house”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) “Changing”</td>
<td>l) “Something was debated”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) “You’re a typical lie”</td>
<td>m) “What’s meant by your rank?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) “John Major announced”</td>
<td>n) “And something was agreed”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Who are the speakers and the listeners in the two poems?
2 Do both poems make use of a similar kind of syntax?
3 Do both poems show connections with the poet’s biography?

VOICES FROM THE US: AFRICAN AMERICAN

1 Complete the following statements about Black society and literature.

1 Black slavery was a typical feature of the ____________ of the US.
2 The ____________ movement led to the Civil War.
3 After the Civil War in the South black people were prevented full ____________ by the policy of segregation.
4 The policy of ____________ was enforced by the Ku Klux Klan.
5 The ____________ fought for de-segregation, while the ____________ advocated the return to Africa.
6 A pacific ____________ movement, led by Martin Luther King developed in the 1950s.
7 ____________ was the leader of the Black Power movement which advocated complete withdrawal from Western society.
8 The two most typical forms of black music in the 19th century were ____________ and the ____________.
9 The ____________ marks the beginning of Black literature.
Module 1

2 Write the name of the work and/or author to which the following key words apply.

1 racial discrimination ............................................................ .................................
2 epistolary ........................................................................
3 violence .............................................................................
4 novel of formation ................................................................
5 non-standard American English ................................................
6 individual self-awareness ......................................................
7 feminism ...........................................................................
8 autobiography ....................................................................
9 relationship inside the black community .................................
10 merging of white and black literary traditions .........................

VOICES FROM THE US: INDIAN, CHINESE AND MEXICAN AMERICAN

1 Base your answers to the following questions on the content and themes of the verbal and visual materials included in Step Three.

1 Which text expresses the view of an impartial observer? a) L. Erdrich, Love Medicine
2 Which text openly asserts the superiority of the ethnic culture over the dominant culture? b) A. Tan, The Joy Luck Club
3 Which text states that people from ethnic minorities feel forced to adapt to the perspectives of the dominant culture? c) P. Desjarlait, Maple Sugar Time
4 In which text is the protagonist painfully ‘divided’ between people from his/her ethnic culture and people from the mainstream culture? d) Y. Soon Min, Make Me
5 In which text are immigrants’ rights those of second-class citizens? e) G. Soto, Mexicans Begin Jogging
6 Which text celebrates ancient ethnic traditions? f) Y. M. Lopez, Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe
7 Which texts were created by artists/writers from ethnic minorities which constitute present American society? g) all texts
8 Which text expresses the artist’s dream or ideal of the new man or woman from his/her ethnic community? h) none of the texts
9 Which text describes a process of increasing understanding between generations?
BLACK BOY by Richard Wright

Here is another extract from Chapter three of Black Boy by Richard Wright.

1 Read it and find relevant quotations for the following themes.

1 racial struggle ............................................................
2 racial prejudice ............................................................
3 violence ............................................................

We were now large enough for the white boys to fear us, and both of us, the white boys and the black boys, began to play our traditional racial roles as though we had been born to them, as though it was in our blood, as though we were being guided by instinct. All the frightful descriptions we had heard about each other, all the violent expressions of hate and hostility that had seeped\(^1\) into us from our surroundings, came now to the surface to guide our actions. The roundhouse was the racial boundary of the neighbourhood, and it had been tacitly agreed between the white boys and the black boys that the whites were to keep to the far side of the roundhouse and we blacks were to keep to our side. Whenever we caught a white boy on our side we stoned him; if we strayed\(^2\) to their side, they stoned us.

Our battles were real and bloody; we threw rocks, cinders, coal, sticks, pieces of iron, and broken bottles, and while we threw them we longed for even deadlier weapons. If we were hurt we took it quietly; there was no crying or whimpering. If our wounds were not truly serious, we hid them from our parents. We did not want to be beaten for fighting.


GEOGRAPHIES OF HOME by Loida Maritza Pérez

The following text is taken from *Geographies of Home* (1999) by Loida Maritza Pérez. The novel depicts the harsh life in New York of a family of immigrants from the Dominican Republic and the impact it has on the lives and destinies of the children which include a battered wife, a psychopathic girl and a career woman. In the extract below the focus is on the mother, Aurelia.

1 Read the text and find out:

- how she feels
- in what way her life was similar and in what way different in the Dominican republic
- what happened to her on arrival in New York
- how she overcame her state.

1. *seeped*, leaked (si infiltravano).
2. *strayed*, trespassed (sconfinavamo).
More and more Aurelia found herself remembering the distant past. She might be in the middle of a conversation or in church listening to a sermon when she would suddenly recall an event, words spoken, even a scent, a flavor, a texture — each evoked as if she were experiencing it at the moment. It was as if, after years of setting aside memories, the pile had grown too high and had tumbled, obliging her to take an inventory of her life. As she delved\(^1\) into the past she was conscious of something missing in the present — something her mother had possessed and passed along to her but which she had misplaced and failed to pass on to her own children. She could not identify what it was, but its absence was felt as acutely as hunger pangs. And she was determined to discover what had caused the loss and to figure out how she had brought herself to the present moment so that she might guide herself into the future.

It wasn't that she romanticized the past or believed that things had been better long ago. She had been poor even in the Dominican Republic, but something had flourished from within which had enabled her to greet each day rather than cringe\(^2\) from it in dread. With bare feet planted on familiar ground, she had trusted her perceptions. Yet assaulted by the unfamiliar and surrounded by hard concrete and looming\(^3\) buildings, she had become as vulnerable as even the Trujillo\(^4\) regime had failed to make her feel.

Everything had seemed grim\(^5\) and violent: the faces encountered on New York streets; the dirty snow hardened into ice and stained with blood where someone had been wounded; the news read in El Diario and heard on Channel 47; the abrasive sound of tires screeching, horns honking, feet trampling about her head. Terrified to step outside and claustrophobic in the three-room apartment shared with Papito and three children she had deteriorated to a skeleton eighty-one pounds. Only the realization that her children would be left motherless in a country whose language and customs she still barely understood had inched her toward health in defiance of the doctors' prediction that she would die. But although she had recovered, she had emerged from a nine-month hospital stay profoundly changed. Gone were her confidence and self-respect. How could she trust herself when she had willingly brought herself to the brink\(^6\) of death? More important, how could she have expected her children to grow strong and independent after they had witnessed her emotional collapse and increasing deference to Papito, who, in turn, placed his burden in the hands of God?


\(^1\) delved, dug (scavava).
\(^2\) cringe from it, shrank back in fear (si ritraeva spaventata da).
\(^3\) looming, impending (che incombevano).
\(^4\) Trujillo, Rafael Trujillo (1891-1961) dictator of the Dominican Republic who seized power in 1930 with the backing of the army and through terrorist activities. The economic improvements under his rule were paid by citizens' loss of civil and political liberties and he eventually was assassinated.
\(^5\) grim, sinister (pauroso).
\(^6\) brink, verge (orlo).
 INTERNAL CERTIFICATION

STEP One

1. Complete the following paragraph about Kureishi’s novel with the appropriate words given below in jumbled order.

   English    humorous    didactic    Londoner    university    immigration
   theatre    individual    sex    middle-class    Tory    narrator    Bombay
   1980s

   The Buddha of Suburbia tells the story of a seventeen-year old (1)_______________ whose father came from (2)_______________ to study at a British (3)_______________ and then settled, marrying an (4)_______________ girl he met in a dance hall. The protagonist and (5)_______________, Karim, comes of age in the course of the novel as he discovers his father’s affair with a (6)_______________ woman, as he discovers the joys of (7)_______________ with both boys and girls and as he begins to work as an actor in a (8)_______________ . It is not only a novel of (9)_______________ growth and discovery, it also shows a fundamental interest in the London of the (10)_______________, influenced by the (11)_______________ outlook on issues such as racism, (12)_______________ and economic success. The author’s tone is not (13)_______________, it is (14)_______________ .

STEP Two

2. Complete the features of Black British poetry in the second half of the 20th century.

   1. Black British poetry has its roots in ________________ (name a country).
   2. Its leading names are ________________. They started being active in the ________________ (mention the decade) when the conflict between Black Youth and police grew violent.
   3. This kind of black British poetry deals with ________________ issues.
   4. It combines with ________________
   5. It needs a close relationship with the ________________
   6. It doesn’t make use of ________________ English

Say if the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

   1. The great majority of slaves lived in the cities.
   2. After the Civil War black people obtained full emancipation both in the North and in the South.
   3. The Great Migration was a massive movement of black people from the South to the North.

* The numbers on the left indicate the maximum number of points for each exercise.
4 Both the Niagara Movement and the back-to-Africa Movement advocated the return to Africa.
5 The Civil Rights movement was a pacifist movement.
6 The Negro Renaissance of the 1920s developed in the South as a reaction to segregation.
7 Black music developed among the slaves.
8 In the twenties black music was influenced by white music.
9 Black literature started with the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s.
10 African American literature is deeply rooted in oral tradition and music.

2 Say to which Black American writer the following statements apply.

1 developed in poetry a form of the oral tradition
2 made African American literature known to the wide white public
3 is interested in recovering folk traditions
4 enlarged the scope of Black literature themes
5 was a pivotal figure in the Harlem Renaissance
6 used modernist narrative techniques
7 based his main work on autobiography
8 is very interested in the female condition within the black community

STEP Three

1 Complete the statements below which are about the verbal and visual material included in Step Three.

1 The Chippewa is one of the many Native ________________ of the US.
2 *Love Medicine* is a novel by ________________ .
3 Amy Tan is an ________________ American novelist who wrote ________________ .
4 The painting *Maple Sugar Time* has links with the novel ________________ because its painter too was born into a ________________ tribe.
5 The bisected images of Yong Soon Min’s face express the conflicting ________________ the mixing of two cultures can force an emigrant to take on.
6 In the poem by Gary Soto, the Mexicans workers begin “jogging” when the border ________________ raids the factory where they are ________________ employed.
7 ________________ is the first language of Mexican Americans. The Spanish word ________________ occurs in G. Soto’s poem.
8 In the painting *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe* the Virgin looks like a vigorous ________________ woman.
2 In the text below a number of characters from the verbal and visual texts included in Step Three speak in the first person. Match each statement with the appropriate corresponding work.

A
1 Some say I am too vigorous for the role I have chosen to play. Also the shoes I am wearing are out of place as well.
2 I am facing a deep crisis. Yesterday evening I was caught between the tensions and conflicts caused by deep differences in cultural traditions. Every social situation can become a source of problems when you live ‘between two worlds’.
3 I believe that people from mainstream culture see me through the deforming film of their stereotypes.
4 Though I am an American-born child of immigrants and I have got American citizenship, some people still think I’m illegally here, in the US.
5 The commitment of one of my relatives to the traditional values rooted in our heritage has helped me to build a sense of pride and self-esteem.
6 The way we work is low and manual in contrast with the frantic mechanised American way.

B
a) L. Erdrich, Love Medicine
b) A. Tan, The Joy Luck Club
c) P. Desjarlait, Maple Sugar Time
d) Y. Soon Min, Make Me
e) G. Soto, Mexicans Begin Jogging
f) Y. M. Lopez, Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe

3 Say whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F). Correct the false ones.

1 Indians are also called Native Americans.  
2 Native Americans were granted United States citizenship after the American Declaration of Independence (1776).  
3 The first wave of Chinese immigrants (mainly in the second half of the 18th century) were well-received by the Americans.  
4 Chinese Americans were the largest group of Asian Americans living in the US.  
5 The campesinos are Mexican American farmers who moved to the US to avoid political unrest at home.  
6 The second massive wave of Mexican immigrants entered the US illegally during the Second World War.  
7 The primary aim of the Chicano Movement is the spread of Mexican American Art.  
8 The notion of the ‘melting pot’ is based on a process of assimilation of the ethnic cultures into the mainstream culture. The metaphor of the ‘salad bowl’ is similar to that of ‘the melting pot’.
The Essay

1. Write a short paragraph in which you explain why Kureishi’s novel can be considered ‘serious’ and ‘not serious’ in its content, themes and tone.

2. Develop the following statement giving appropriate examples.

   A common theme which links various black authors is the theme of the human condition. In some of them it is closely related to race and racial discrimination, in others it takes on a universal value.

3. Relationships between ethnic minorities and the mainstream culture may give rise to different responses among the individuals involved. Choose two writers and two artists from the one included in the Module and write two paragraphs about the feelings of the characters torn between two worlds – that of their ethnic heritage and that of mainstream culture.

   Before writing the paragraphs consider your choices in relation to the concept of assimilation. In which is the level of assimilation low, high? In which is it a desirable process? In which is it a rejected goal?

   Below is a grid of a four-point scale. Place each text at what you think are appropriate points.

   ![Assimilation Scale](image-url)
Module 1

VOICES FROM GREAT BRITAIN

1 You should have mentioned the following essential points among others:
   Story content: it is the story of a young man’s journey of self-discovery as he learns about his father, his own interests in sex, his first attempts to work as an actor, etc.
   Protagonist: a seventeen-year-old Londoner of mixed race, Karim
   Narrator: the narrator is Karim, first-person, non-omniscient
   Language and tone: – informal, intimate, humorous
   Humour: verbal and situational, irreverent, based on juxtaposition of words, hyperbole, etc.

2 Independence: b), d), f), i) (final line), j), k) (opening line), m Acts of Parliament: motion 2: a), c) (final line), e), g) (opening line), h), i), n)
   1 In Independence the speakers are the inhabitants of the island and the listeners are those who lied to them and want to get hold of the island. In Acts of Parliament: motion 2 the speaker is a person who thinks very low of politics and politicians. The listener can be a general audience the poet aims to persuade. / 2 Both poems make use of short sentences, phrases and single words. / 3 Both poems show connections with Zephaniah’s biography who has recently been involved in many political debates. The language and form of the two poems bear the mark of his Jamaican origin and his great interest in Jamaican music.

VOICES FROM THE US: AFRICAN AMERICAN

1 South; 2 abolitionist; 3 emancipation; 4 segregation; 5 Niagara Movement, back-to Africa Movement; 6 Civil Rights; 7 Malcolm X; 8 spirituals, blues; 9 the Harlem Renaissance

2 Langston Hughes, Richard Wright; 2 Alice Walker; 3 Richard Wright, Alice Walker; 4 Ralph Ellison; 5 Alice Walker; 6 Ralph Ellison; 7 Alice Walker; 8 Richard Wright; 9 Alice Walker; 10 Ralph Ellison

VOICES FROM THE US: INDIAN, CHINESE AND MEXICAN AMERICAN

1 rh), 2a), 3d), 4b), 5e), 6c), 7g), 8f), 9a)

Module 1

BLACK BOY

1 racial struggle: “both of us, the white boys and the black boys, began to play our traditional racial roles as though we had been born to them, as though it was in our blood, as though we were being guided by instinct.” / 2 racial prejudice: “All the frightful descriptions we had heard about each other, all the violent expressions of hate and hostility that had seeped into us from our surroundings, came now to the surface to guide our actions.” / 3 violence: “Whenever we caught a white boy on our side we stoned him; if we strayed to their side, they stoned us. Our battles were real and bloody; we threw rocks, cinders, coal, sticks, pieces of iron, and broken bottles, and while we threw them we longed for even deadlier weapons.”

GEOGRAPHIES OF HOME

1 – She feels homesick and she keeps revisiting her past. / – In the Dominican Republic her life was similar as regards poverty, but it was different because she was not afraid as she was in New York and was able to enjoy life. / – She felt caged and frightened in New York and as a result she fell ill and spent nine months in a hospital risking her life. / – The thought of her children helped her overcome the depression.

2 loss of roots and sense of estrangement: “was conscious of something missing in the present – with bare feet planted on familiar ground, she had trusted her perceptions. Yet assaulted by the unfamiliar and surrounded by hard concrete and looming buildings, she had become as vulnerable as even the Trujillo regime had failed to make her feel.” / 2 violence: “the Trujillo regime”; “Everything had seemed grim and violent: the faces encountered on New York streets; the dirty snow hardened into ice and stained with blood where someone had been wounded; the news read in El Diario and heard on Channel 47; the abrasive sound of tires screeching, horns honking, feet trampling about her head.” / 3 sense of motherhood: “Only the realization that her children would be left motherless in a country whose language and customs she still barely understood had inched her toward health in defiance of the doctors’ prediction that she would die.”

3 third-person narration from Aurelia’s point of view.
Module 1

STEP One

1. 1 Londoner, 2 Bombay, 3 university, 4 English, 5 narrator, 6 middle-class, 7 sex, 8 theatre, 9 individual, 10 1980s, 11 Tory, 12 immigration, 13 didactic, 14 humorous
2. 1 Jamaica; 2 Lynton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah in the 80s; 3 political; 4 music; 5 audience; 6 standard

STEP Two

1. 1 F, 2 F, 3 T, 4 F, 5 T, 6 T, 7 T, 8 F, 9 T, 10 T
2. 1 Langston Hughes, 2 Richard Wright, 3 Alice Walker, 4 Ralph Ellison, 5 Langston Hughes, 6 Ralph Ellison, 7 Richard Wright, 8 Alice Walker

STEP Three

1. 1 tribes; 2 Erdrich; 3 Asian, The Joy Luck Club; 4 Love Medicine, Chippewa; 5 identities; 6 patrol, illegally; 7 Spanish, vivas; 8 Chicano
2. 1 f), 2b), 3d), 4e), 5a), 6c)
3. 1 T; 2 F (Native Americans were granted American citizenship only in the 1920s, more precisely in 1924); 3 F (they were subjected to discrimination as they were considered competitors for jobs. The Americans repeatedly banned further immigration from China); 4 T; 5 T; 6 F (the American Government needed labourers to replace the soldiers fighting in Europe and allowed the massive immigration of Mexican people into the country); 7 F (the primary aim of the movement is to secure Civil Rights and economic opportunity for the Mexican American community); 8 F (only the second part of the statement is wrong: the metaphor of the ‘salad bowl’ is the opposite of the metaphor of the ‘melting pot’. The first is based on the sense of ‘separateness’ of the several ethnic groups coexisting in the US).