

Describing Elements of Life in Harlem

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Describing is representing an object, action, or idea in words.

You use describing when you

- give backgrounds on the characters in a video game to someone unfamiliar with the game
- write about an unusual play you saw in a basketball game
- tell a friend about the clothes members of a band wore during a concert
- put into words the sounds an old car is making
- explain the setting for a story about a family trip

In what other situations would you use the skill of describing?

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Cluster Question: What was life like during the Harlem Renaissance?

If someone asked you and five of your friends to describe life in your school community, would your answers be the same? Most likely not. The description you offer would depend on your particular experiences. Since you and your friends have had different experiences, your descriptions would be different. They might contain some of the same elements, but they would also contain different elements. A complete description, then, would include elements of all six of your individual descriptions.

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Directions: The following screens show excerpts from several selections in Cluster One. List the elements of life described in each excerpt. Then combine your lists to create a two- to three-line description of what life was like in Harlem during the 1920s and '30s, the primary years of the Harlem Renaissance.

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Excerpt	Elements of Harlem Life
<p>[Seventh Avenue] reflected almost every form of life uptown—with its stores, churches, beauty parlors, doctors' offices, theatres, night clubs, nice-looking apartment buildings, and private brownstones.</p> <p>from "Seventh Avenue: The Great Black Way," p. 16</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">—places for commerce and worship—health care facilities—entertainment venues—quality housing

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Excerpt	Elements of Harlem Life
<p>At the corner of Seventh and 125th Street . . . was Harlem's best hotel, the Theresa. It was not until around 1940, however, that the Theresa began admitting blacks.</p> <p>from "Seventh Avenue: The Great Black Way," p. 18</p>	

Answer: blacks were prohibited from some places, including Harlem's best hotel

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Excerpt	Elements of Harlem Life
<p>The clanging of metal . . . , the hiss of steam, women wearily pushing twelve pound irons, women mechanically tending machines . . . that was the scene that greeted me as I stood in the laundry's ironing department.</p> <p><i>continued</i></p>	

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Excerpt	Elements of Harlem Life
<p>Shirts, thousands of white shirts that produced such a dazzling glare that the women . . . wore dark glasses to protect their eyes. The heat was almost unbearable . . .</p> <p>from “Laundry Workers’ Choir,” pp. 23–24</p>	

Answer: hard work, less-than-desireable working conditions

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Excerpt	Elements of Harlem Life
<p>A four- or five-room apartment was (and still is) often crowded to capacity with roomers. In many instances, two entire families occupied space intended for only one family. . . . Then the rents were raised. . . . Harlemites soon discovered that meeting these</p> <p><i>continued</i></p>	

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Excerpt	Elements of Harlem Life
doubled, and sometimes tripled, rents was not so easy. from “Rent Parties,” pp. 38–39	

Answer: crowded living conditions, extravagant rental rates, opportunity to make good money

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Excerpt	Elements of Harlem Life
<p>The good news about jobs spread like wildfire throughout the Southlands. There was money, good money, to be made in the north, especially New York.</p> <p>from “Rent Parties,” p. 39</p>	

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Description of life in Harlem during the 1920s and '30s

Note: As you progress through Cluster One, you will be asked to revise your description to make it more complete.