

## Born by a River

By Keenan Norris

Illustrated by Katia Grifols

Curriculum developed by Rosalind Helfand

Supplementary Curriculum developed and copy edited by Léna Garcia



## OVERVIEW

### Quick-Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

<b>Student Population</b>	
Age/Grade-Level Appropriateness	16+, 11th+
Genre/s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Essay</li> <li>* African-American history</li> <li>* Urban Studies</li> </ul>
Length	* 2,281 words
Content Advisories	Understanding this essay requires knowledge of 20th century African-American history in America. It can be approached as a complement to a course in black history or as a starting point from which to learn more about people and topics in black history. The essay touches on issues of segregation, racism, and other human rights abuses.
One-Sentence Summary	Author Keenan Norris explores his Chicago family roots in a far-ranging essay that dives into the history of the Great Migration of African-Americans from the South into the cities of the North and the opportunities it brought, as well as the ensuing housing and job segregation that impacts urban American life to this day.
<b>Lesson Planning</b>	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	<p><b>Topics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* African-American history</li> <li>* Housing segregation in urban America</li> <li>* Racism and poverty</li> <li>* Chicago history</li> <li>* African-American literature</li> <li>* The Great Migration of African-Americans from the rural south to cities</li> <li>* Post-war America</li> <li>* Cause and effect</li> </ul> <p><b>Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The power of our roots</li> <li>* The insidiousness of prejudice</li> <li>* How the past impacts and shapes people and society in the present</li> <li>* Applying lessons from past events to present issues</li> <li>* The human tendency to engage in patterns and repetition of behavior</li> <li>* The Great Migration (mass movement of 5 million southern African-Americans to the north and west between 1915 and 1960)</li> <li>* Racial segregation in America</li> </ul>
Historic Events/Time Period for Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* History of Chicago</li> <li>* 1919 Chicago Race Riot</li> <li>* Harlem Renaissance</li> <li>* History of segregation (especially housing segregation) in Los Angeles</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* American Prohibition</li> <li>* The Great Depression</li> <li>* The New Deal</li> <li>* Post-WWI America</li> <li>* Post-WWII America</li> <li>* Civil Rights Movement</li> <li>* Apartheid</li> <li>* Progressive Era</li> <li>* Labor Movement</li> </ul>
<p>Complementary Classic &amp; Historic Texts</p>	<p>Books:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Native Son</i> by Richard Wright</li> <li>* <i>Invisible Man</i> by Ralph Ellison</li> <li>* <i>Annie Allen</i> by Gwendolyn Brooks</li> <li>* <i>The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks</i> by Gwendolyn Brooks</li> <li>* <i>Black Metropolis</i> by Horace Cayton, Jr. and St. Clair Drake</li> <li>* <i>The Best of Simple: Stories</i> by Langston Hughes</li> <li>* <i>Anyplace But Here</i> by Arna Bontemps</li> <li>* <i>Dreams of My Father: A story of Race and Inheritance</i> by Barack Obama</li> <li>* <i>Richard Wright: The Life and Times</i> by Hazel Rowley</li> <li>* <i>Ralph Ellison: A Biography</i> by Arnold Rampersad</li> <li>* <i>Black Thunder</i> by Arna Bontemps</li> </ul> <p>Poems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* "The Weary Blues" by Langston Hughes</li> </ul> <p>Play:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Lysistrata</i> by Aristophanes</li> </ul> <p>Articles:</p> <p>"The Forgotten Girls Who Left the South and Changed History" by Marcia Chatelain (about African American women and girls of the Great Migration who came to Chicago): <a href="http://ti.me/2ukDFoD">http://ti.me/2ukDFoD</a> (<a href="http://ti.me/2ukDFoD">http://ti.me/2ukDFoD</a>); "Segregation in the City of Angels: A 1939 Map of Housing Inequality in L.A." by Ryan Reft: <a href="http://bit.ly/2tg4PYD">http://bit.ly/2tg4PYD</a> (<a href="http://bit.ly/2tg4PYD">http://bit.ly/2tg4PYD</a>)</p> <p>Film:</p> <p><i>Get Out</i> by Jordan Peele and accompanying review, "Getting In and Out," by Zadie Smith: <a href="http://bit.ly/2swzQsx">http://bit.ly/2swzQsx</a> (<a href="http://bit.ly/2swzQsx">http://bit.ly/2swzQsx</a>)</p> <p>Also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Encyclopedia of Chicago History: <a href="http://bit.ly/1dEcuQY">http://bit.ly/1dEcuQY</a> (<a href="http://bit.ly/1dEcuQY">http://bit.ly/1dEcuQY</a>)</li> <li>* BlackPast.org: <a href="http://bit.ly/1N1N9T0">http://bit.ly/1N1N9T0</a> (<a href="http://bit.ly/1N1N9T0">http://bit.ly/1N1N9T0</a>)</li> <li>* Labor Movement</li> </ul>
<p>Author &amp; Artist Information</p>	<p><b>Keenan Norris</b> is a writer living in Oakland, CA.</p> <p><b>Katia Grifols</b> is an artist living in Burbank, California.</p>
<p>Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3,</p>

	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.A, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.C, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.D, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.E, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.A, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.B, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.C, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.D, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5</p>
--	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

### Author Biography

**Keenan Norris’s** novel *Brother and the Dancer* won the 2012 James D. Houston Award. He’s completing his next book, about Richard Wright, Barack Obama, and the problem with “Chi-Raq.” He holds an MFA from Mills College and a PhD from the University of California, Riverside. Keenan is a 2017 Marin Headlands artist in residence and a Yerba Buena Center for the Arts fellow. He teaches English, African-American Literature, and facilitates a study abroad program at Evergreen Valley College. He’s served as a guest editor for the Oxford African-American Studies Center and is a Faculty Advisor with Goddard College. Keenan’s short work, both fiction and nonfiction, has appeared in numerous forums, including *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Literature for Life*, *popmatters.com*, *Post-Soul Satire*, *Inlandia: A Literary Journey Through California’s Inland Empire* and *Oakland Noir*. He is also the editor of *Street Lit: Representing the Urban Landscape*.

### Artist Biography

**Katia Grifols** grew up in Barcelona, Spain. She studied art and comics all over the world before taking root in Burbank, California to start her own business, *Glow in the Dark Concept Studio!* Through her intensive studies and lifelong love of sequential art, Katia developed her own vision for the work she wants to see in the world, striving for bold, creative new visual ideas and stories. Among other work, Katia has notably done concept/visual design for Disney (on their highly successful *Princess* and *Fairies* product lines), as well as for *Dreamworks Animation* (*Kung Fu Panda 3*, *HTTYD 2*, and others). She has several comics published in Europe through *Norma*, *Planeta Editorial*, and *Soleil*, with a brand new comic coming out. Her art can be spotted in galleries all over L.A., from *Qpop* to *Center Stage Gallery* and *Pop Secret Gallery*. Through *Glow in the Dark*, she is hard at work developing several exciting new IPs slated for late 2017/early 2018. More information can be found at her studio’s website, [glowinthedark.studio](http://glowinthedark.studio).

### SYNOPSIS

This historic essay by Keenan Norris is based on his forthcoming book, and combines a reflection on his family’s roots with diving deep into the history of the Great Migration, when millions of Southern blacks moved to the North and West of America between 1915 and 1960. The essay traces the manifestation

---

and proliferation of housing segregation in Chicago and its impact on the lives of the migrants. “Born By the River” is a strong complement to a unit on American or African-American history, as well as to discussions about segregation and civil rights in the United States.

## CURRICULUM

### Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

#### Topic

What do you know about African-American history? Brainstorm events, issues, accomplishments, and historic figures as a class. Apply dates or approximate time periods, as well as locations, to these events. Then, identify any gaps—temporal or geographic. What are they? Discuss this as a class, then ask students to use the essay to help fill in their gaps in knowledge.

#### Main Ideas

What housing difficulties are students aware of in Los Angeles? Is it worse in certain areas and for certain people? Ask students to journal about their observations regarding housing issues in Los Angeles. Ask them to then break into small discussion groups of four to five and discuss some of their observations. Circulate and help facilitate discussions.

*Note: The teacher should brush up on articles from reputable sources about current housing issues in Los Angeles before conducting this activity.*

#### Passage-Specific Themes

Read the following passage from “Born By the River” about the sociologist Horace Cayton, Jr. who lived from 1903-70:

... Cayton, a black man with a white wife, native to relatively tolerant Seattle, was as shocked as was the Southerner Wright to find in Chicago some of the most virulent racism the nation had to offer (Rowley 54). Cayton’s interracial marriage was stigmatized as if he and his wife were below the Mason-Dixon, “[a]ccommodation, social interaction, employment—everything posed a problem” (190).

In four-to-five student groups, research the history of interracial marriage in the United States. What arguments did people make against it? Who stood up in support of it, and how and when did it become legal? Ask each group to share some of their responses, then hold a class discussion on the topic, including contemporary observations on this subject—does prejudice still exist? What forms does it take?

#### Universal Themes

Where do you or your family come from? How did you/they arrive and settle in Los Angeles? Did you/they immigrate internationally or travel from east to west, north to south, or from rural to urban?

In a 15-minute journaling exercise, reflect on and discuss in what ways your experiences or the experiences of your family members (or ancestors) who migrated shaped your perspective on the world?

#### Key Vocabulary

Definitions are context-dependent. Make sure any definitions you look up or work from are the ones that most correctly fit in the context of the story.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
trauma/traumatic	amnesia	Richard Wright (Pioneering African-American writer best known for the classic texts <i>Black Boy</i> and <i>Native Son</i> – Biography.com)
destruction	anesthesia	Barack Obama (44th American President and the first African-American President)
unconsciousness	quivering	Chicago (The name Chicago comes from a Miami Native-American word for the wild leeks that grew on the bank of the short Chicago River. Over the centuries, the Miami, Sauk, Fox and Potawatomi tribes all lived in the area. Now, the largest city of the American Midwest, Chicago, Illinois, was founded in 1830. Established as a water transit hub, the city evolved into an industrial metropolis, processing and transporting the raw materials of its vast hinterland. – History.com)
nerves	forthcoming	Great Migration (A long-term movement of African Americans from the South to the urban North that transformed Chicago and other northern cities between 1916 and 1970 – Encyclopedia of Chicago)
peeled	talisman	WWII (World War II was a global war that lasted from 1939-45.)
experience	subsequent	Migrant (A person who moves from one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions – Oxford Dictionary)  Migratory (Characterized by migration; undergoing periodic migration – Free Dictionary)
particular	interrogate	Hazel Rowley (An acclaimed biographer of wide-ranging subjects—from <i>Native Son</i> author Richard Wright

		to French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre – The Washington Post)
lens	raw	criminal syndicate (A loose affiliation of gangsters in charge of organized criminal activities -Vocabulary.com)
transplants	characteristic	Prohibition (Legal prevention of the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages in the United States from 1920 to 1933 under the terms of the Eighteenth Amendment [later repealed] – Encyclopedia Britannica)
wake	hallmarks	reefer pad (A house, apartment, or room where marijuana users gather to smoke – Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang)
haunted	offerings	Card shark (An expert card player—Merriam Webster)
risk	signal	mulatto (A person of mixed white and black ancestry; considered to be an offensive term – Merriam-Webster)
express	cordoned	Policy Kings (Policy was an illegal gambling game played in urban African-American communities from the late 1800s to the 1970s. The policy racket was originally controlled by African-Americans, who became known as the policy kings (and queens—a few women ran numbers games, too). But by the 1930s, white gangsters had taken over the racket in all major Northern cities except one—Chicago. In Chicago, the policy kings formed a syndicate that successfully fought off takeover by white organized crime for over 20 years. – Author Christine Fletcher)
reflected	continuous	Crapshooter (A gambler who plays the game of craps, a game played with two

		dice – Merriam-Webster)
deprived	time period	numbers racket (The numbers game, also known as the numbers racket, is an illegal lottery played mostly in poor neighborhoods in the United States, wherein a bettor attempts to pick three digits to match those that will be randomly drawn the following day. – Wikipedia)
diverse	deprivation	maelstrom (A powerful often violent whirlpool sucking in objects within a given radius – Merriam-Webster)
shadowy	rife	Ghetto (A section of a city, especially a thickly populated slum area, inhabited predominantly by members of an ethnic or other minority group, often as a result of social or economic restrictions, pressures, or hardships – Dictionary.com)  The word's original meaning: "the quarter in a city, chiefly in Italy, to which the Jews were restricted," as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it. In the 16th and 17th centuries, cities like Venice, Frankfurt, Prague, and Rome forcibly segregated their Jewish populations, often walling them off and submitting them to onerous restrictions. – NPR  ghettoize (To put in or restrict to an isolated or segregated place, group, or situation. – Merriam-Webster)
schemes	vice	de facto (In fact; in reality; actually existing, especially when without lawful authority. -Dictionary.com)
typical	flourished	racial segregation (The practice of restricting people to certain circumscribed areas of residence or to separate institutions (e.g., schools, churches) and facilities (parks, playgrounds, restaurants, restrooms) on the basis of race



		or alleged race. Racial segregation provides a means of maintaining the economic advantages and superior social status of the politically dominant group, and in recent times it has been employed primarily by white populations to maintain their ascendancy over other groups by means of legal and social color bars. – Encyclopedia Britannica)
equally	underworld	Langston Hughes (An American writer who was an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance and made the African- American experience the subject of his writings, which ranged from poetry and plays to novels and newspaper columns. – Encyclopedia Britannica)
native	moniker	Arna Bontemps (An award-winning African-American author and poet known for his books featuring black characters, including God Sends Sunday), Black Thunder, Story of the Negro, and Great Slave Narratives. – Biography.com)
tolerant	bewildering	Horace Cayton, Jr. (Sociologist and writer who co-wrote Black-Metropolis about the structure of Chicago’s black community and died while writing a biography about African-American novelist Richard Wright. - blackpast.org)
racism	stark	interracial marriage (Interracial marriage in the U.S. has been fully legal in all states since the 1967 Supreme Court decision that deemed anti-interracial marriage laws unconstitutional, with many states choosing to legalize interracial marriage at earlier dates. – Wikipedia)
Social interaction	tumultuous	stigmatized (If someone or something is stigmatized, they are unfairly regarded by many people as being bad or having something to be ashamed of. – HarperCollins)

		Dictionary)
accommodation	virulent	<p>Mason-Dixon Line            (Originally the boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania in the United States. In the pre-Civil War period it was regarded, together with the Ohio River, as the dividing line between slave states south of it and free-soil states north of it. Today the Line still serves figuratively as the political and social dividing line between the North and the South, although it does not extend west of the Ohio River. – Encyclopedia Britannica)</p>
posed	pioneering	<p><i>Black Metropolis</i>            (First published in 1945, <i>Black Metropolis</i> is a landmark study of race and urban life, offering a comprehensive look at black life in America. Based on research conducted by Works Progress Administration field workers, it is a sweeping historical and sociological account of the people of Chicago's South Side from the 1840s through the 1930s. Its findings offer a comprehensive analysis of black migration, settlement, community structure, and black-white race relations in the first half of the twentieth century. – University of Chicago Press)</p>
expert	forcibly	<p>Northern/North            (The region historically identified as the free states that opposed slavery and the Confederacy during the American Civil War. This struggle against slavery and secession obscured the reality that the North was actually four separate and not so similar areas: New England, the Middle Atlantic states, the Old Northwest (East North Central States in federal terms), and the Great Plains (West North Central States). Recognized as these four areas, the North includes Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska,</p>

		<p>New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wisconsin. Of these, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota were not states at the time of the Civil War, and Missouri, though part of the Union, was a slave state; thus, regional lines were, and remain, unclear. Regional distinctions, however, did exist. As early as 1796, President George Washington used the terms North and South, warning against the danger of basing political differences upon geographic lines. The most critical sectional distinction, however, had already been recognized in 1787, when slavery was banned in the Northwest Territory (an area known today as the American Midwest). Soon after the American Revolution, slavery disappeared in all states north of the Mason and Dixon Line, the boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland. – Encyclopedia Britannica)</p>
overstanding	under-resourced	<p>academic rigor (The term rigor is widely used by educators to describe instruction, schoolwork, learning experiences, and educational expectations that are academically, intellectually, and personally challenging. – edglossary.org)</p>
consequences	socially acceptable	<p>covenant (A usually formal, solemn, and binding agreement – Merriam-Webster)</p> <p>[racially] restrictive covenant (Restrictive covenants can limit a variety of options for homeowners, from landscaping to structural modifications to circumstances of sale or rental. Racially restrictive covenants, in particular, are contractual agreements among property owners that prohibit the purchase, lease, or occupation of their premises by a particular</p>

		<p>group of people, usually African Americans. Rare in Chicago before the 1920s, their widespread use followed the Great Migration of Southern blacks, the wave of housing-related racial violence which plagued the city between 1917-21, and the U. S. Supreme Court's 1917 declaration that residential segregation ordinances were unconstitutional. The high court's subsequent dismissal of Corrigan v. Buckley in 1926 tacitly upheld these private, restrictive agreements and paved the way for their proliferation. In 1948 the U.S. Supreme Court finally declared restrictive covenants unenforceable in Shelley v. Kraemer. – Encyclopedia of Chicago)</p>
<p>exposing</p>	<p>ironically</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Black</p> <p>Belt (A region in Alabama and Mississippi, U.S., named for its dark, calcareous soils. It was one of the South's most important agricultural areas before the American Civil War. The term has been borrowed by social scientists to denote areas of the South where the plantation system with black slaves predominated before the Civil War. – Encyclopedia Britannica)</p> <p>Black Belt of Chicago (The Black Belt of Chicago was the chain of neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago where three-quarters of the city's African American population lived by the mid-20th century. Many African Americans who moved to the Black Belt area of Chicago were from the Black Belt in the Southeastern region of the United States. – Wikipedia)</p>

### Vocabulary Activity Options

1. What does segregation mean? Look up this term, and then research the history of African Americans in Chicago, especially during the Great Migration, and their experiences with segregation during this time. How did it impact African American communities? Write a short essay on this subject. Include discussion of Jim Crow laws, James Crow, Esq., apartheid in America, the Mason-Dixon Line, the color line, and other historic people and references made in the essay that connect to the issue of segregation.
2. The following terms from “Born By the River” refer to housing situations and housing segregation: kitchenette, tenement, cold-water flat, redlining, gridding, slums, restrictive covenants, ghetto, Black Belt of Chicago, and sub-division. Look up these words and write about what they mean in context of the essay and the issues and events that connect them.
3. Research the concept of demographics and demographic shifts. What do these terms apply to in the essay? How are these terms used most often now, and what, through your research, do you see them applied to most often? Finally, how is demographic information gathered and who decides what to gather? Choose an example from contemporary U.S. governance to illustrate your answer.
4. What is the study of sociology and who does this work for a living? How are sociological findings important for understanding and improving our society? Write a short essay.
5. What is the philosophy of “determinism” and why is it relevant in context of this essay? Research this term and its use and write a short essay.
6. What is a political machine or “machine politics”? Research this term and its history in the U.S., as well as its relevance in the context of this essay. Then research discussion of “machine politics” today. Can this term still be applied in the U.S.? Is it a good or a bad thing or somewhere in between? Ask students to choose a position on this issue (or assign positions to take and defend regardless of the students’ personal views) and hold a class debate.

### Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. Who was the author Ralph Ellison? When did he live, how was his life influenced by the Great Migration, what did he write, and why is his work so important? After researching these questions, re-read the quote by Ralph Ellison at the beginning of “Born By the River.” What makes this quote both poignant and relevant to the essay? What emotions does the quote evoke when its meaning is fully understood?
2. During the Great Migration, millions of African Americans moved from the rural South to Northern cities. What do you think this line from the essay means? Discuss: It was, and still is, if you’re a country boy, a bit much.
3. In “Born By the River,” Norris says: Chicago must have seemed an absolutely bewildering mix of hope and fear, opportunity and stark, desperate risk. He discusses the Harlem Renaissance and the famous African-Americans in the arts, politics, science, academia, sports, and literature who found opportunity during the Great Migration. At the same time, he discusses the many African Americans who experienced racial segregation, poor housing, and poverty. A common saying is that if one works hard enough, one can accomplish anything. In the context of the Great Migration and the segregation African Americans experienced in Chicago, is this always true? Were those African-Americans who weren’t successful not as hard working? Discuss this issue in class.

4. Read the following quote from “Born By the River”: Even the University of Chicago itself participated in planned segregation by financially backing restrictive covenants written to stop the spread of blacks into Hyde Park (47-49). Frustratingly, despite Cayton’s activism and the equally stalwart anti-covenant protests of fellow University of Chicago sociologist Louis Wirth, the researchers by their very employment were maintaining an institution that abetted America’s urban apartheid. Norris claims that Cayton and Wirth should be held responsible for the actions of their employer, the University of Chicago, even if they disagreed with those actions. Debate as a class whether you agree with Norris’ position on this issue. Should people bear responsibility for the actions, practices, and financial investments of their employer? If they know their employer’s actions to be wrong and continue to work for them, are they assisting in those wrong actions? There is a greater movement calling on universities around the world to not invest financially in companies with questionable human rights and environmental records, even if those investments allow the universities to provide some of their programs. Do you agree with this movement? Why or why not? Do your research, consider your position carefully, and be prepared to present your views to your class. Bonus: Look up what “conflict of interest.” How does this term apply to this debate?

*Note for teacher: Make sure various sides of this debate are well-represented by the students and do your own research in advance.*

### Text-Dependent Question Options

1. Research and analyze the title of the essay. What does each portion of the title refer to: the river, Richard Wright, Barack Obama, and “Chi-Raq”? How are they linked in context of the essay? In his bio, Norris indicates that there’s a “problem with ‘Chi-Raq’” and places the word in quotes even though it often doesn’t appear this way. Why, in context of this essay, do you think Norris is critical of this term? Answer these questions citing evidence from the text.
2. In “Born By the River,” Norris refers to Jim Crow versus James Crow and “de facto segregation.” What are the differences between “Jim” and “James Crow”? Which is linked to the idea of “de facto segregation,” and in what ways? Use examples from the text to support your answer.
3. What is the meaning of “terrorism,” and how is it most often used in contemporary media? In “Born By the River,” Norris says that sociologist Horace Cayton Jr. was:
 

... recording the consequences of Northern racism and segregation, exposing with academic rigor the acts of terrorism and restrictive covenants that forcibly created the overcrowded, under-resourced Black Belt (Duneir 29).

Further research the acts that led to the creation of Chicago’s Black Belt and in light of what you learn, as well as examples from the essay, discuss what you think Norris means by “terrorism” in this context.
4. Although “Born By the River” is a nonfiction essay, how does the author insert both himself and his father into the essay as characters in the story of Chicago—and the aftermath of the Great Migration?
5. In “Born By the River,” Norris writes about the irony of African Americans leaving the racism of the South only to encounter the “more capricious” Northern prejudice. What does Norris mean by “more capricious” and why was this situation ironic? Cite evidence from the text.

6. Research the 1919 Chicago Race Riot. What is the story of this riot? What happened, what events led to the riot, and what happened as a result of the riot? How does the riot figure into the issues discussed in “Born By the River”?
7. “Born By the River” mentions discrimination in hiring people for jobs and segregation in labor unions. Research and discuss these issues citing evidence from the text. Then, review contemporary articles about discrimination based on race and gender in American hiring practices. Is this still an issue in America? What is being done to overcome it, and who is leading such efforts? What challenges do people face in overcoming modern discrimination in America?
8. Analyze the juxtaposition of color, form, and outline in the artwork for the essay. In the context of the essay’s themes and the historic events which it discusses, what do you believe the artwork means? Discuss in full using examples from the art and the text.

## Writing Exercises

### Narrative

People often move to other cities, states, or countries to seek new opportunities and better the quality of their lives. Write a five- to seven-page story—either a fiction piece or a nonfiction personal narrative—about a person who immigrates or migrates to another place and their experiences. Make sure to create a plot, strong characters, and a clear beginning, middle and end for your story.

During your story, make it clear why your characters left their home, what they hoped to find in their new home, and what their lives are like now.

### Descriptive

Research the housing conditions in Chicago’s South Side following World War II. Then, write a fictional narrative describing in detail the life of a family living in those conditions during that time period.

### Analysis

Option One: “Born By the River” is an academic essay and yet, in the introduction, the author discusses how deeply personal it is due to his family’s history. What about Norris’ family history makes the essay so personal? Consider your own family’s history. Have your parents or ancestors dealt with social and historic difficulties, too? Write your own essay about a difficult time period, social ill, or historic event that had an impact on your family and, thus, in some way touches you.

Option Two: Health care is an issue that is constantly discussed in the United States. In “Born By the River,” Norris says:

... as documented in a 1924 Urban League study of Harlem, America’s second largest black ghetto during the first half of the century (after Chicago’s South Side): ‘colored renters paid from forty- to sixty-percent higher rents than [did] white tenants for the same class of apartment’ (Wilkerson 277). The crowding that this over-charging caused resulted in skyrocketing disease rates in the Black Belt of every Northern city: in Harlem during the Depression, Tuberculosis made a comeback, slicing through

tenements and government housing (New York: City of Tomorrow, Episode 6). A similar determinism etched the South Side, where '[d]isease—scarlet fever, tuberculosis, pneumonia, typhoid . . . was seven times higher than anywhere else in the city' (Rowley 53-54).

Research and discuss the ways in which issues of societal and economic inequality are linked to poorer health in America.

### Complementary Reading Text

Allow each student to choose a book, play, or set of poems from the Complementary Texts list (or from Norris' Works Cited at the end of his essay).

#### Writing Exercise

After reading their chosen texts, students should write a three- to four-page essay discussing the text and how it ties into the subject matter of Norris' essay.

### Activity Options

#### Classroom Activity One

Create a large classroom mural that forms a visual timeline of all of the events, locations, and people discussed in "Born By the River." Rather than a purely linear timeline, use a full wall space to creatively depict how various events and people were linked to one another, overlapped, or set the stage for one another. Consider going 3D with the timeline.

Break the students into teams to work on different aspects of the mural, and have team leaders interact to figure out how to make their sections fit together. Consider using the vocabulary list as a means of dividing assignments for the teams.

#### Classroom Activity Two

Norris describes a number of well-known authors, sociologists, elected officials, athletes, doctors, etc. in "Born By the River." Below is a list of many of the people mentioned in the essay, as well as several additional African-American leaders from Chicago and from the Harlem Renaissance:

- \* Ralph Ellison
- \* Richard Wright
- \* Oscar De Priest
- \* Horace Cayton, Jr.
- \* Gwendolyn Brooks
- \* Langston Hughes
- \* Barack Obama



- \* Arna Bontemps
- \* Hazel Rowley
- \* Jesse Owens
- \* Jackie Robinson
- \* David Bradley
- \* Charles Drew
- \* Louis Wirth Additional:
- \* Margaret Walker
- \* St. Clair Drake
- \* Georgia Douglas Johnson \* Regina Anderson
- \* Alice Dunbar-Nelson

Ask students to break into pairs or small groups and create a work of art for each leader that includes a portrait and biography. Each group should choose one person to present about their leader to the rest of the class. Hang these artworks in the classroom or hold a class art show and ask families to attend.

### **Home Activity**

After having learned about how residential segregation came to be in US cities, research contemporary sociological maps of both Los Angeles and Chicago that reveal racial and economic divides. Review the terms “demographics” and “demographic shifts.”

Create a visual presentation that compares and contrasts the geographic demographics of the maps. Review Los Angeles and Chicago history and include a historic comparison of how these demographics were shaped over time in your presentation.

### **Guest Speaker**

Option One: Invite the author, Keenan Norris, to speak with your class about “Born By the River,” his work, and his forthcoming book.

Option Two: Invite the History Curator of the California African-American History Museum to come and speak with your class. Ask the Curator to read “Born By the River” prior to their visit.

### **Field Trip**

Take a class trip to the California African American History Museum in Exposition Park, Los Angeles.

Writing Exercise: Take notes on what you learn during your museum visit. Specifically, look for information that can relate to “Born By the River.” Write a short essay about what you learned and how it further illuminates the topics and issues discussed in the essay.

**TEST PREPARATION COMPONENT**

**Instructions:** Closely read this passage from “Born by the River,” using the graphic organizer to develop your thoughts.

**Text:**  
 Of course I was unaware of the population-level cause and effect of our crowding when my parents joined the Migration to Chicago. I was two years old when we arrived in the big city. I know from my mother that it was a harsh entry, that initially we were the ones you read about coming from the country, up from the South with no knowledge of the North and what it would entail. Maybe my father was more worldly than most, owing to his tenure in the military, which accustomed him to busy nighttime streets, storefronts, nightclubs, and walk-ups that melted one into the next like one flowing, penetrable form. Still, we came to the city and slept on kitchenette floors and four and five to a bed. We were without work and winter clothes and went on relief. I’m glad that all I remember from my first year or two in Chicago is this hazy image that for all I know I made up to fill in for my emptiness, innocence, and ignorance: in my mind, we were at the outdoor ice rink downtown. I did not have any sisters yet, so it was just my parents and me. I remember them hoisting me up and lowering me gently to the ice. I remember touching the ice, how hard and fascinatingly, unchangingly cold it was, not like snow, which melted in my hands like people disappearing around Kinzie Avenue’s corners, into its alleyways, suddenly out of my sight. Not like ice in a glass that melted in my throat or of its own slow transformation. No, this ice was changeless and forever; it was more impenetrable than was anything I had felt, the surest, safest thing that I had ever known. I was two or three years old. I had travelled a long ways and had survived terrors worse than anything in my nightmares. I trusted the ice.

<p><b>Who is telling the story and why?</b></p>  <p>What is their point of view?</p>  <p>Their tone?</p>	<p><b>Unpack a few resonant words the author uses to tell her story:</b></p>    <p>What other rhetorical choices are made and why?</p>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p><b>What is memorable about the characters?</b></p>      	<p><b>What is/are the main idea(s)?</b></p>      
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------



**COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE**

*This story and exercises are appropriate for 11-12th grade. Eleventh- and twelfth-grade standards are cited.*

**Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8: Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10 (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/10/>): Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**Vocabulary Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3: Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare, as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8: Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10 (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/10/>): Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11-12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.A: Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.B: Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., conceive, conception, conceivable).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.C: Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, its etymology, or its standard usage.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.D: Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### **Post-Reading Class Discussion Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3: Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10 (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/10/>): Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8: Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B: Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D: Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.A: Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4.C: Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, its etymology, or its standard usage.

### **Text-Dependent Question Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3: Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1 (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/11-12/1/>): Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3 (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/11-12/3/>): Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8: Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

---

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10 (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/10/>): Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

### **Writing Exercise Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.A: Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.C: Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.E: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8: Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10 (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/10/>): Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**Complementary Reading Text (Comparative Writing Exercise)**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.10 (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/10/>): Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8: Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.



