

Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen*Standards Focus: Analyzing Poetry*

After the Civil War ended and slaves were officially freed, African-Americans were still persecuted throughout the United States. Jim Crow laws were introduced, further segregating blacks from whites, creating an enormous rift in race relations. Blacks were treated as second-class citizens for decades, even until the 1960s during the Civil Rights movement when segregation was outlawed and blacks were given the same rights as everyone else. Although race relations and equality are still an issue today, we have progressed, and are closer to achieving equal rights for all United States citizens.

Throughout time, writers, musicians, and artists have documented the struggle of African-Americans on their journey toward equality. During the 1920s and 30s, African-American writers and artists became mainstream, and more people were exposed to the plight of the black person in this country. One of those famous writers of the time was poet and novelist Langston Hughes, who was a major contributor during the time of the Harlem Renaissance, when African-American ideas, thoughts, dreams, and fears were celebrated through literature, art, and music.

Directions: For this exercise, you will be analyzing two famous poems by Langston Hughes. When you have finished reading each poem, complete the tasks and answer the questions on the next page.

I, Too, Sing America

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.

Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—
I, too, am America.

A Dream Deferred

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes Poetry Analysis

Directions: After reading each poem by Langston Hughes, answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper using complete sentences.

I, Too, Sing America

1. What do you think Hughes meant by the line "I, too, sing America"?
2. Besides himself, who is the "darker brother," in a larger sense?
3. Who is the "They" to whom Hughes refers?
4. Who was sent to "eat in the kitchen"?
5. What does Hughes mean by the metaphor "Tomorrow/ I'll be at the table/ When company comes"?
6. Why will no one "dare" to tell him to "eat in the kitchen"? What expectation does Hughes have in mind?
7. What does Hughes want his audience to realize with the last line: "I, too, am America"?

A Dream Deferred

1. What does the word "deferred" mean? Use a dictionary if you need help.
2. What does Hughes mean by a "dream deferred"? To what dream could he be referring?
3. What rhetorical device does Hughes use throughout the poem?
4. What literary devices does Hughes use in this poem? Find 3 examples of use of figurative language, then explain the type of figurative language being used, along with an analysis of the line.
5. How can a dream "explode"? Explain what you think this line means.

Final Questions

1. How do these two poems relate to the themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Explain.
2. How do these poems reveal what life was like for African-Americans in the 1920s and 30s?
3. How do you think Hughes would have reacted about the events surrounding the Tom Robinson case?

Bonus: Write a short poem expressing what you think Hughes would have wanted to say about Tom Robinson's case and how he was being treated by Maycomb's citizens.