Langston Hughes
ASSESSMENT AND PROGRESS MONITORING
Responding to Literature (Pre-Assessment Prompt)
Scoring Guide
Responding to Literature (Post-Assessment Prompt)
Scoring Guide

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Responding to Literature

Poetry has been defined as “putting the best possible words in the best possible order.” Like all writers, Langston Hughes chooses words carefully and organizes them to share his insights with you, his reader.

In his poem “Minstrel Man,” Langston Hughes writes about African American performers. In the old days, a *minstrel* was a musician who sang songs that told stories.

Read “Minstrel Man” in *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (page 36) once to see how Hughes’ presents this topic. As you read, ask yourself:

• What is this poem about?
• What is Hughes saying about the experience of the speaker of the poem?

Then read the poem one or two more times in order to decide which parts of this poem are “the best possible words in the best possible order.” Take notes as you do the following tasks:

• Describe the speaker of the poem
• Describe the subject/topic of the poem
• Describe the author’s attitude toward the subject
• Explain the author’s message or theme
• Choose an important word or phrase from the poem and write about why it is important for understanding the author’s message or theme

Use your notes to write a well-organized essay in which you explain the poem. Support your explanation by referring to specific words, phrases, lines, stanzas, and/or sections where Langston Hughes uses the “best possible words in the best possible order” and explain why you chose them.
Scoring Guide

Student’s Name: ___________________________  Student ID: ______________________

Read each of the statements below and circle the number on the scale that most accurately reflects your assessment of the paper.

4 = strong  3 = satisfactory  2 = somewhat weak  1 = weak

1. The paper clearly introduces the poem, the topic, and the author.  4  3  2  1

2. The paper explains what Hughes is saying about how the speaker feels and what he thinks.  4  3  2  1

3. The paper cites several specific words, phrases, and/or lines to support the writer’s explanation of the poem.  4  3  2  1

4. The paper shows how the meaning of the words, phrases, and/or lines contribute to the meaning of the poem.  4  3  2  1

5. The paper explains how selected words, phrases, and/or lines are the “best possible words in the best possible order.”  4  3  2  1

6. The paper is clearly organized.  4  3  2  1

7. The paper moves smoothly from one idea to the next.  4  3  2  1

8. The paper uses terms that clearly communicate the ideas and information.  4  3  2  1

9. The paper includes a concluding statement or section that reiterates the connections between the language of the poem and its meaning.  4  3  2  1

10. The surface features (spelling, punctuation, and grammar) are reasonably accurate.  4  3  2  1
You may recall that poetry (and all good writing) has been defined as “putting the best possible words in the best possible order.” Like all writers, Langston Hughes chooses words carefully and organizes them to share his insights with you, his reader.

In his poem “As I Grew Older,” Langston Hughes writes about what happens to dreams. Read the poem in *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (pages 70–71) once to see how he presents this topic. As you read, ask yourself:

- What is this poem about?
- What is Hughes saying about the experience of the speaker of the poem?

Then read the poem one or two more times in order to decide which parts of this poem are “the best possible words in the best possible order.” Take notes as you do the following tasks:

- Describe the speaker of the poem
- Describe the subject/topic of the poem
- Describe the author’s attitude toward the subject
- Explain the author’s message or theme
- Choose an important word or phrase from the poem and write why it is important for understanding the author’s message or theme

Use your notes to write a well-organized essay in which you explain the poem. Support your explanation by referring to specific words, phrases, lines, stanzas, and/or sections where Langston Hughes uses the “best possible words in the best possible order” and explain why you chose them.
Scoring Guide

Read each of the statements below and circle the number on the scale that most accurately reflects your assessment of the paper.

4 = strong 3 = satisfactory 2 = somewhat weak 1 = weak

1. The paper clearly introduces the poem, the topic, and the author. 4 3 2 1

2. The paper explains what Hughes is saying about how the speaker feels and what he thinks. 4 3 2 1

3. The paper cites several specific words, phrases, and/or lines to support the writer’s explanation of the poem. 4 3 2 1

4. The paper shows how the meaning of the words, phrases, and/or lines contribute to the meaning of the poem. 4 3 2 1

5. The paper explains how selected words, phrases, and/or lines are the “best possible words in the best possible order.” 4 3 2 1

6. The paper is clearly organized. 4 3 2 1

7. The paper moves smoothly from one idea to the next. 4 3 2 1

8. The paper uses terms that clearly communicate the ideas and information. 4 3 2 1

9. The paper includes a concluding statement or section that reiterates the connections between the language of the poem and its meaning. 4 3 2 1

10. The surface features (spelling, punctuation, and grammar) are reasonably accurate. 4 3 2 1
Motto

I play it cool
And dig all jive.
That’s the reason
I stay alive.

My motto,
As I live and learn,
is:

*Dig And Be dug*
*In Return.*
Motto

I _______
And _______.
That’s the reason
I _______.

My motto,
As I live and learn,
is:
_________.
## Independent Reading Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title of book</th>
<th>Pages read</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>
Close Reading Questions for “Motto”

Discuss the following questions with your partner and jot down ideas to prepare for sharing with the whole class.

1. What does “play it cool” mean? What might this expression mean in the language of jazz and jazz music?

2. What does it mean to “dig all jive”? Have you ever heard the expression, “Can you dig it?” If so, what does it mean? Why do you suppose Hughes included the word “all” in that line?

3. What would happen if we understood the poem to be read with the literal definitions from the dictionary for the words “cool” and “dig”? How would the meaning change? How does Hughes’ use of slang affect the poem?

4. Is Hughes being serious when he writes, “That’s the reason/I stay alive”? Explain your thinking.

5. The actual motto is in the second stanza: “Dig and be dug/In return.” What is he saying?

6. In what way can learning and understanding and maybe using “all jive” be important for survival?
Vocabulary from the Readings

These words come from today’s reading:

• **droning**—making a low continuous, dull sound

• **drowsy**—feeling sleepy and unable to think clearly

• **mellow**—pleasant, smooth, and rich in sound

• **ebony**—black

• **croon**—the sound of singing or humming quietly and gently

• **pallor**—paleness or unhealthy coloring

• **rickety**—likely to collapse

• **raggy**—in the style of ragtime music
About the Blues

“They all stem, all blues, from the old-time basic anonymous 12-bar, 3-line lyric, deep South blues that nobody knows who made up, nobody knows who added what line where. They grew into jazz, America’s great music, whose heartbeat is those sad, old, bad old, glad old blues, crying, laughing—laughing maybe to keep from crying. And that’s the way it is with the blues. They are often very sad songs. But there is almost always in the blues something to make you smile, and in their music a kind of marching-on syncopation, a gonna-make-it-somehow determination in spite of all, that ever-present laughter-under-sorrow that indicates a love of life too precious to let it go.”

Notes

Sentence 1: No one knows exactly who created the blues verse structure.

Sentence 2: The blues evolved into jazz, America’s great (original art form) music where the rhythm and lyrics encompassed the painful life experiences in a way that made them bearable.

Last Sentence: Nearly always in the blues there are several positive aspects such as:

• Humor
• An inspiring, quirky rhythm
• Determination to overcome troubles
• Love of living

Questions on “The Weary Blues”

• Why does Langston Hughes embed blues stanzas in this poem? What is the effect of showing what the musician is singing?

• How does the speaker feel about the piano player? How do we know?

• What humor is in this poem? How can something so sad and pathetic also be a bit ridiculous? Explain your thinking.
More Questions on “The Weary Blues”

• Where is the imagery in “The Weary Blues”? What do you see? How does it affect the poem’s meaning?

• How does Langston Hughes use rhythm? Where do you see or hear rhythm in the poem? How would you describe the poem’s rhythm?

• Where in the poem does Hughes use rhyme? How does the rhyming add to the poem’s meaning?

• How do imagery, rhythm, rhyme, and the speaker of the poem contribute to the tone of melancholy/sadness?

• Speculate about why people sing the blues and why people listen to the blues. How are the blues entertaining?

• What might be a message or meaning of this poem?
Coding the Text

As you read the passage about Langston Hughes’ life, place a sticky-note in the margins using the codes shown here.

**I = important**
This is for an idea or passage or word that you think is important in a major way.

**# = interesting**
This is for an idea or passage that you think is interesting. You might like to talk more about it. But, it is not important in a major way.

**? = I don’t understand or I have a question about this.**
This is for any word or passage that you don’t understand. If you have a question about what you’ve read, be prepared to share it in class.
Questions on “Mother to Son”

• How does the word “But” in line 8 change the focus of the mother’s message to her son?

• How does the word “So” in line 14 shift her focus?
  - In your opinion, what are the mother’s attitudes toward her life and toward her son? In other words, what is the tone of the poem? Refer to the definition of tone in Lesson 3.

• Speculate about the length and spacing of the lines:
  - Why do you suppose Langston Hughes began and ended each line the way he did?
  - Why, for example, do you think line 7 (just the word “Bare”) has only one word when all the rest of the lines have more words?
### Possible Responses to Questions on “Mother to Son”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Possible Student Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does the word “But” in line 8 change the focus of the mother’s message to her son?</td>
<td>“But” means “however” or “even so,” so the mother seems to be changing something. In lines 2–7, she is explaining what kind of stairs she climbs, what obstacles or risks or dangers she faces. But with line 8, she changes to say that even though all these negative influences are there, she doesn’t give up. She says “a-climin’ on” and “reaching landin’s” and “turnin’ corners.” It’s like the poem has three sections: the first part telling what her stairs are like; the second part is about how she keeps going, even though it’s tough; and the last part is to encourage her son to keep going and not give up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the word “So” in line 14 shift her focus?</td>
<td>At line 14, the mother reaches the point of the poem. She has had a tough life, but she kept on going. So, or therefore, he should, too. She is giving him advice from this point on, not just explaining her situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why, for example, do you think line 7 (just the word “Bare””) has only one word when all the rest of the lines have more words?</td>
<td>“Bare” means that there is nothing extra there, no covering or carpet or protection. So by just having that one word, Hughes is emphasizing what “Bare” means. It’s also like a kind of stopping place for that section of the poem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Guiding Questions for “Daybreak in Alabama”

• What is most clear to you as you read the poem?

• How do you know that you understand this part of the poem?

• What is important in the poem?

• What tools does Hughes use to convey his ideas in “Daybreak in Alabama” (e.g., metaphor, simile, imagery, repetition, anaphora, rhyme, stanzas, line breaks, dialect, etc.)?
Group Project Directions

1. With your teacher’s help, choose one of the suggested poems.

2. Read the poem together aloud. Then have at least two people in your group read it so that you hear it in a range of voices. Be sure to put sticky-notes next to your favorite lines and next to anything you notice about the way that the poem is written.

3. Share with each other any initial ideas you have about what the poem is saying or what it is about.

4. Be sure to ask about any words you do not understand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For Homework</th>
<th>For class work in your group during Lesson 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Record your ideas in your Reader’s Notebook:</td>
<td>Lesson 8:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Express your opinion about what is the most important word in the poem and why you think it is the most important. When you share your response with your group members, the exercise will help you consider multiple ideas about the poem.</td>
<td>a. Share your homework with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Choose an important image from the poem and make a sketch of it to show your group.</td>
<td>b. Decide on an image to draw in the center of your chart paper. This picture should take up more space than any of the other elements on the paper. Use color. Decide who in the group will do the drawing, writing, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Write what you think might be the theme: What is Hughes saying through this poem?</td>
<td>c. Write a theme statement along the bottom of the chart paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Choose one or two lines from the poem that support the ideas of your theme statement.</td>
<td>d. Agree on one word to be most important, and write that word and your explanations right above the theme statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Write those lines down.</td>
<td>e. Surround your picture with quoted lines from the poem that support your theme statement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once you have completed your poster, decide how each person will explain your work in your presentation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotation</th>
<th>Title of Poem</th>
<th>Quotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quotation</td>
<td>Image with explanation</td>
<td>Quotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotation</td>
<td>Most Important Word and Why</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement of Theme</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Theme: Sometimes the only way to express unhappiness

THE WEARY BLUES

I'm so tired, and I can't be satisfied.

He made that poor weary blues
I got the moon and I can't see.

Put in my troubles on the street.

Coming from a black man's soul.
## Group Project Rubric

### Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Points</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Theme statement at bottom of poster</td>
<td>The statement is a complete thought that correctly captures the meaning of the poem.</td>
<td>The theme is expressed as a topic and may be an incomplete thought.</td>
<td>There is no theme statement on the poster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Most important word with explanation</td>
<td>The group has decided on one “most important word” and explained why that word is important in the poem.</td>
<td>The group has chosen a “most important word,” but they have not adequately explained why it is important.</td>
<td>There is no “most important word” on the chart.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>An image from the poem is drawn and placed in the middle of the poster prominently.</td>
<td>The group has chosen an appropriate image and drawn it in the middle of the poster.</td>
<td>The group has chosen an image and has placed it on the poster but not prominently.</td>
<td>There is no image drawn on the poster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Quotations from the poem</td>
<td>The group has placed at least three quotations from the poem on the poster.</td>
<td>There are no quotations from the poem written on the poster.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Presentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>The title of the poem appears prominently on the poster.</th>
<th>The title of the poem is not on the poster.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Correctness</td>
<td>There are few if any incorrect spellings or grammar usages on the poster.</td>
<td>Incorrect spellings and/or grammar use detracts from the poster.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Author Study: Langston Hughes*
## Group Evaluation Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Poem</th>
<th>Our Rubric Score</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>This student’s contribution to our group project was ...</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Vocabulary from the Readings II

These words come from today’s reading:

- **testament**—something that shows that another thing exists or is true
- **Shiva Naipaul**—an allusion to a writer from Jamaica
- **Du Bois**—an allusion to W. E. B. Du Bois, writer and scholar
- **conceptualize**—to think in abstract concepts or ideas
- **Jordan**—an allusion to the Biblical Jordan River which the ancient Hebrews had to cross over to enter their promised land
- **opes**—an old form of *opens*
- **chalice**—a large gold or silver cup with a stem; Dunbar is using *chalice* as a metaphor for a flower that has opened up and makes its nectar available to birds
- **fain**—an archaic adverb meaning *willingly*
- **proscribed**—forbidden
- **aspirations**—desires to achieve things
- **Dayton, Ohio**—a city in the free state of Ohio (meaning that slavery was not legal there) across the river from Kentucky, a slave state
- **The Iliad, The Odyssey, Song of Roland**—these are the titles of epic poems that people told over and over
- **‘buked**—slang form of *rebuked*, meaning *spoken to severely by someone who disapproves of you*
- **compelled**—forced to do something you don’t want to do
## Paragraph-by-Paragraph Analysis

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraph</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Langston Hughes, “everybody's favorite writer,” wrote “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” when he first crossed the Mississippi River. When Giovanni says, “It is such a testament,” she means that it is his way of showing something important exists and is true.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>An important idea from paragraph 2 is that we (all humans) come from water. She might mean that many great civilizations started near rivers. She may even mean that life forms on earth probably originated in water.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In paragraph 3, Giovanni states that Langston Hughes makes the claim for African Americans that they were present at the civilizations that began nearby rivers. When she says, “The blues are a river that we ride down and paddle up,” she may mean that the blues are a vehicle or means for riding the river of life. African Americans negotiated their way through life by and through the blues, just as they had travelled on rivers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It pleases Giovanni that Hughes dedicated his poem to W. E. B. Du Bois because he believed that African Americans had to show the rest of the world that they were fully human. The “never-ending battle” line in the essay refers to the struggle that African Americans have had with convincing the slave owners and others in the United States that they are more than animals or brutes to be beaten into submission. Rather they are human beings in the full sense of the words, and Hughes’ poem affirms that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Giovanni records several ways that rivers and water have been part of the experience and mindset of African Americans, showing up in Negro spirituals. When she describes the Jordan River as “a metaphor for life,” she suggests that African Americans have the goal of crossing over—to the promised land of freedom or to heaven.</td>
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Vocabulary from the Readings III

These words come from today’s reading:

• **guile**—the quality of being good at deceiving others in clever ways

• **myriad**—a very large number or great variety

• **subtleties**—very small details that are not obvious

• **nay**—interjection; an old version of *no*

• **vile**—very unpleasant

• **tenuousness**—weakness or uncertainty

• **whit**—old form meaning *not at all*
Sample Responses to Giovanni’s Reflection

Teacher Reference

“Sympathy”

• “I know what the caged bird feels” is one of the great lines of poetry because African Americans know how it feels to be held against one's will.

• “I know why the caged bird sings” is another great line because it affirms that in singing we find a way to make something positive out of bad circumstances.

• She affirms that “everybody does whatever he can to be free.” To fly is a metaphor for seeking freedom.

• Slave stories are filled with characters who want to (and do) fly away.

• The bird's song is a prayer, and life is a prayer.

• African American slaves told their story through songs, the Negro spirituals (and later the blues).

• Singing helps relieve tension and bitterness.

• Even when we are forced to do something we don’t want to do or to be someone we don’t want to be, we always have the option to say, “This is not a part of me. I am someone else.”
Vocabulary from the Readings IV

These words come from today’s reading:

- **illusion**—a false idea or belief (sometimes confused with “allusion,” a specific reference)
- **brooding**—an atmosphere or feeling that makes you feel anxious or slightly afraid
- **contemplators**—people who think deeply or who think in a serious and calm way
Directions for the Reading Notes Final Project

• All your work should be in your Reader’s Notebook. You should have a Table of Contents for the 15 In-Class Poems and a separate Table of Contents for the 10 Outside-of-Class Poems. These Tables of Contents should list each poem’s title, source, and page number.

• Each Reading Note should include the poem’s title and the author’s name at the top of the page.

• If the poem is not in one of our classroom’s three anthologies, then you must copy the poem on your Reading Note page, above your writing.

• Each Reading Note should show your thinking: analysis, explanations, questions, and/or observations, especially ideas pertaining to the details in the poem.
  – These notes could contain a quick write about the most important word or a quick sketch of an image in the poem.
  – The notes do not have to follow any specific format.

• Each Reading Note should have one or two detailed paragraphs summing up your ideas about the poem and giving your response.
  – You should explain how the poem works—how the details contribute to the meaning.
  – You may write a personal response showing your reaction to the poem or its ideas.
# Checklist for the Reading Notes Final Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Reading Notes clearly introduce the poem, the topic, and the author.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Reading Notes explain how the speaker feels and what he thinks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reading Notes cite several specific words, phrases, and/or lines to support the writer’s explanation of the poem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reading Notes address how the meanings of the words, phrases, and/or lines contribute to the meaning of the poem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Reading Notes project has 15 entries for poems read in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Reading Notes project has 10 entries for poems I read outside of class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The surface features (spelling, punctuation, and grammar) are reasonably accurate.</td>
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</table>

**Student Name** ____________________________ **Course/Period** _____________
Work Guide for Analyzing a Poem

Poem: __________________________ Partner Names: ___________________

- What is the poem about?
- Write a statement of theme for the poem.
- What is the most important word in the poem? Explain why.
- What is an important image in the poem? Either describe it or draw it and explain your drawing.
- What details in the poem (vocabulary choice, rhythm, rhyme, figurative language, allusion) contribute to the poem’s theme? How does each detail contribute?
- How does the structure or arrangement of the poem contribute to its meaning?
- Cite two or three lines from the poem that support the theme.

Directions for Writing

- Based on your answers to these questions, write an explanation of how the poem works and include quotations from the poem.
- End your composition with a personal reflection: How do you react to the poem? How does it impress you or make you feel?
Poem: *Motto*                  Partner Names: __________________________

Questions for Analyzing A Poem

• What is the poem about?
  He says that he tries to like people and things, and have them like him, too.

• Write a statement of theme for the poem.
  Be cool. Be positive.

• What is the most important word in the poem? Explain why.
  Cool. It means mellow. He doesn’t go out looking for trouble or making trouble for other people.

• What is an important image in the poem? Either describe it or draw it and explain your drawing.
  It’s not exactly in the poem, but I have an image of someone playing jazz or the blues or something. Maybe a saxophone.

• What details in the poem (vocabulary choice, rhythm, rhyme, figurative language, allusion) contribute to the poem’s theme? How does each detail contribute?
  He uses slang, which makes it sound real, like someone is really saying this. He uses the words of jazz or the blues, which makes me think of music. “Cool” also means calm and sophisticated.

• How does the structure or arrangement of the poem contribute to its meaning?
  It’s almost like couplets and that makes it like something to chant. It’s short. The second and last lines of each stanza rhyme, and he sets off the words “My Motto” by themselves, which makes them seem important.

• Cite two or three lines from the poem that support the theme.
  1. I play it cool and dig all jive.
  2. Dig and be dug in return.

Directions for Writing

• Based on your answers to these questions, write an explanation of how the poem works and include quotations from the poem.

• End your composition with a personal reflection: How do you react to the poem? How does it impress you or make you feel?
The theme of “Motto” by Langston Hughes is that it is important to be mellow and open to new things and people. He says that his goal is to enjoy people and things and to have them like him in return. It’s the way that he has stayed alive in this world.

The most important word in this poem is “cool,” which is an old word for “mellow” or “easy-going.” He says that he “plays it cool,” and by this, he means that he is easy to get along with and doesn’t go out looking for trouble or making people mad.
Sentence Frames

For analysis

• The theme of this poem is ________, which is revealed through the line(s) ________.
• Hughes uses the words _______ in the line _______. This helps illustrate the theme because ________.
• _______ is the most important word in the poem because ________.

For explanation

• When Hughes writes ________, he means that ________.
• Hughes uses _______ in the line(s) _______, which means _______ because ________.

For personal reflection

• When I read ________, I feel ________.
• The lines _______ cause me to think ________.
• The lines make me feel ________.
Vocabulary from the Readings V

These words come from today’s reading:

• **Congo Square**—an area in New Orleans where slaves gathered on Sundays (their day off) to socialize and make music. It was famous for its African-style sounds and dance as early as the 1700s.

• **Juba-dance**—a rhythmic style of dance that often set the beat for other music

• **Jelly Roll (Jelly Roll Morton), Buddy Bolden, Kid Ory, St. Cyr**—famous jazz musicians
Listening to Essays

1. Choose someone to read first.

2. Writer #1 should read the rough draft aloud with pen in hand to make any changes that occur to him or her during the reading.

3. The other people in the group should listen to the reading to identify the poem’s title and theme.

4. After the reading, they should tell the writer the title and the theme, and the writer should highlight those things on his or her draft.

5. Writer #1 should read the rough draft again, and the other people in the group should listen for the details—the information about the words and structure—that illustrate that theme.

6. After the reading, they should tell the writer which details they heard, and, again, the writer should highlight the details on his or her draft.

7. Finally, the listeners should tell the writer two things:
   - Which part they liked best
   - Any ideas they might have for additional lines or structure information that the writer could use to make the paper even better

8. After the writer has taken notes on the group’s insights, move on to Writer #2 and repeat the process. Then repeat again for Writer #3.
Guidelines for Readers Theater

- Stand with your group at the front of the class.

- Signal to each other to begin reading.

- Read your highlighted parts slowly, deliberately, like lines from a play. (You can shout, whisper, or use a voice in between those two extremes.)

- Remember that if the word is not highlighted, everyone in the group must read it.

- When you have finished, wait for applause and take a bow.
Readers Theater Directions

This will be a presentation done in three voices. Like jazz, this presentation will include both solos and ensemble pieces and will be done in a rolling style, with one voice handing off to the next.

Find “Drums,” Hughes’ poem on pages 46–47 of Poetry for Young People: Langston Hughes, and use the following notes to find your lines. Place sticky-notes next to your lines so that you can practice reading.

Voice #1 Name ________________________________

Stanza #1 – Read it all
Stanza #2 – Only the first word
Stanza #3 – Last word only
Stanza #4 – The second word in the second line only
Stanza #5 – Line 4
Stanza #6 – Lines 1, 2, 3, 6, and last word
Stanza #7 – Read it all (that one word)
Stanza #8 – Last word only
Stanza #9 – First word only
Stanza #10 – Read it all

Voice #2 Name ________________________________

Stanza #1 – The second word in the second line only
Stanza #2 – Last 2 words
Readers Theater Directions (continued)

Stanza #3 – Read it all
Stanza #4 – First and last words only
Stanza #5 – Line 4
Stanza #6 – Line #4 and last word
Stanza #7 – Read it all (that one word)
Stanza #8 – Last word only
Stanza #9 – Last line
Stanza #10 – First and third lines

Voice #3 Name _________________________________

Stanza #1 – Second word in the second line
Stanza #2 – Last word
Stanza #3 – Second word in the second line
Stanza #4 – Second and third words
Stanza #5 – Read it all
Stanza #6 – Line 5 + the last word in the stanza
Stanza #7 – Read it all (that one word)
Stanza #8 – Read it all
Stanza #9 – Last line
Stanza #10 – First and last lines
Discussion Questions for “Drums”

• What word would you choose as most important to the poem?
  - How many chose “remember” as the most important word? Explain why.
  - How many chose “drums”? Why?
  - Did anyone choose another word?

• What images do you see in their mind’s eye, and why are those images important?

• How does Hughes use figurative language?

• What other features do you notice in the poem? For example, how does Hughes use structure or repetition, and what affect do those things have?

• Are there any particular details in the poem that you had stronger feelings about?

• What connections can you draw between the slavery experience and drums or between slavery and jazz?

• We know Langston Hughes disapproves of slavery, but in this poem how does his speaker express attitudes toward slavery?

• How can we be sure about Hughes’s attitudes if he doesn’t express them explicitly on the page?
Personal Reflection

- Writer #1 should read the personal reflection section of the essay aloud to the group.
- The listeners should listen carefully to learn how the poem affected the essay’s writer and to understand the reasons for the writer’s response.
- When the writer has finished the reading, the listeners should state the writer’s feelings and reasons, paraphrasing the words that they heard.
- Meanwhile, the writer should take notes about any changes that should be made before the essay is submitted for a grade.
- Repeat this process for each writer in the group.
Guide for Discussion of “Theme for English B”

• For each section, give a brief explanation; for example, you might say that the first section (just one line) sets a context in a teacher-student relationship.

• For section 2, lines 2–5, how would you explain what is being said?
  - What do you notice that is different from most of the rest of the poem?
  - Do you agree that if you let your writing “come out of you” that “it will be true”?

• For section 3, lines 6–15, how would you explain what is being said?
  - What’s the question in line 6?
  - What information about the speaker is important? Why?

• For section 4, lines 16–40, how would you explain what is being said?
  - What is the speaker reflecting about?
  - What conclusions does the speaker come to?
  - Is it purposeful, do you think, that some sections at the end contain some rhyme? Is there a pattern for the rhyme?
  - What does the speaker mean when he says, “That’s American”?
  - In what ways are the speaker and the instructor alike?
  - In what ways are they not alike?
  - What point is Hughes making?

• The final section, line 41, the speaker confirms that he has completed the assignment.
  - Has the page come out of him? Has he been honest?
Guide for Discussion of “Theme for English B” (continued)

- Is the page “true”?

- His “page for English B is a tangible thing”—it can be held, it is literal, it is concrete. What might the page symbolize? Use details from the poem to support your thinking.
Scoring Guide

Student’s Name: ________________________________  Student ID: __________________

Read each of the statements below and circle the number on the scale that most accurately reflects your assessment of the paper.

4 = strong  3 = satisfactory  2 = somewhat weak  1 = weak

1. The paper clearly introduces the poem, the topic, and the author.  4 3 2 1

2. The paper explains what Hughes is saying about how the speaker feels and what he thinks.  4 3 2 1

3. The paper cites several specific words, phrases, and/or lines to support the writer’s explanation of the poem.  4 3 2 1

4. The paper shows how the meaning of the words, phrases, and/or lines contribute to the meaning of the poem.  4 3 2 1

5. The paper explains how selected words, phrases, and/or lines are the “best possible words in the best possible order.”  4 3 2 1

6. The paper is clearly organized.  4 3 2 1

7. The paper moves smoothly from one idea to the next.  4 3 2 1

8. The paper uses terms that clearly communicate the ideas and information.  4 3 2 1

9. The paper includes a concluding statement or section that reiterates the connections between the language of the poem and its meaning.  4 3 2 1

10. The surface features (spelling, punctuation, and grammar) are reasonably accurate.  4 3 2 1
Editing Your Essay

• Trade papers with a partner.

• Read your partner’s paper aloud as he or she listens. Read the paper as it is written. If you find that the rhythm is off or a word looks odd, stop and work together to correct the punctuation or the spelling.

• Have your partner read your paper aloud to you. Listen to the reading. If your partner’s phrasing or rhythm sounds odd, it is probably because your punctuation needs some work. If your partner cannot recognize or pronounce a word, it may be because the spelling needs some attention. Work with your partner to fix these problems.

• Use your notes, both from the groups earlier in the week and from the editing today, to write a final, polished draft of your work to submit at the beginning of Lesson 16. When you submit your work, staple your final draft to your rough draft(s).
Vocabulary from the Readings VI

These words come from today's reading:

- **deferred**—arranged to happen at a later date, rather than immediately or at the previously planned time; put off
- **fester**—become infected, making worse
- **boogie**—dance to fast popular music
- **rumble**—a low continuous noise
- **Re-bop, Mop**—words mimicking musical sounds of jazz
- **treble**—the higher notes of a piano or other music
# Explaining Figurative Language

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<th>What happens to the deferred dream</th>
<th>What Hughes’ language means</th>
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Vocabulary from the Readings VII

These words come from today’s reading:

- **scorn**—show contempt for someone or something
- **adorn**—decorate; make to look more beautiful
- **saps**—weakens or destroys
- **avarice**—extremely strong desire for money and possessions
Close Reading Questions for “I, Too”

• Who is the speaker of the poem? Identify or describe the speaker.

• What parts of the poem talk about present day? What parts talk about the future?

• Why do you think Hughes uses the image of eating (in the kitchen or at the table)? Is he being only literal or could eating with others stand for something more? What?

• “Too” means also. Who else “sings?”

• How does the last line of the poem help Hughes make an important point?
Vocabulary from the Readings VIII

These words come from today’s reading:

- **exotic**—unusual or interesting, usually because it comes from a distant land
- **idyllic**—extremely pleasant, simple, and peaceful without any difficulties or dangers
- **pastoral**—place, atmosphere, or idea characteristic of peaceful country life and scenery
- **segregation**—dividing something into parts that are loosely connected
- **pathetic**—sad and weak, or helpless
- **melodramatic**—treating a situation as much more serious than it really is
- **Aryans**—used in Nazism to designate a supposed master race of non-Jewish Caucasians having especially Nordic features
- **droll**—amusing or witty, sometimes in unexpected ways
- **Jim Crow**—stereotypic black man in 19th-century song and dance acts
- **accommodations**—buildings or rooms where people live or stay
The speech by Langston Hughes at the Public Session of the Third American Writers’ Congress, Carnegie Hall, New York City, June, 1939.

1 Twice now I have had the honor and the pleasure of representing the League of American Writers at Congresses held abroad in Paris and in Spain. In Europe I spoke first as an American and as a writer, and secondarily as a Negro. Tonight, here in New York at the Third American Writers’ Congress, I feel it wise in the interest of democracy to reverse the order, and to speak first as a Negro and a writer, and secondarily as an American—because Negroes are secondary Americans. All the problems known to the Jews today in Hitler’s Germany, we who are Negroes know here in America—with one difference. Here we may speak openly about our problems, write about them, protest, and seek to better our condition. In Germany the Jews may do none of these things. Democracy permits us the freedom of a hope, and some action towards the realization of that hope. Because we live in a democracy, tonight I may stand here and talk to you about our common problem, the problem of democracy and me.

2 Since this is a Writers’ Congress, I shall approach that problem as a writer. I shall speak of the color-line as it affects writers, as it affects me—and when I say me, I do not mean me, myself, alone. By me, I mean all those Negro writers who are seeking to put on paper today in the form of verse, or prose, or drama, life in America as we know it.

3 Here are our problems: In the first place, Negro books are considered by editors and publishers as exotic. Negro material is placed, like Chinese material or Bali material or East Indian material, into a certain classification. Magazine editors will tell you, “We can use but so many Negro stories a year.” (That “so many” meaning very few.) Publishers will say, “We already have one Negro novel on our list this fall.”

4 The market for Negro writers, then, is definitely limited as long as we write about ourselves. And the more truthfully we write about ourselves, the more limited our market becomes. Those novels about Negroes that sell best, by Negroes or whites, those novels that make the best-seller lists and receive the leading prizes, as almost always books that touch very lightly upon the facts of Negro life, books that make our black ghettos in the big cities seem very happy places indeed, and our plantations
in the deep South idyllic in the pastoral loveliness. In such books there is no hunger and no segregation, no lynchings and no fears, no intimidations and no Jim Crow. The exotic is the quaint and the happy—the pathetic or melodramatic, perhaps, but not the tragic. We are considered exotic. When we cease to be exotic, we do not sell well.

5 I know, of course, that very few writers of any race make a living directly from their writing. You must be very lucky and very famous to do that. But a great many American writers—who are not Negroes—may make a living in fields more or less connected with writing. They may thus be professional writers living on or from their literary reputations and able, from their earnings, to afford some leisure time for personal creation. Whether their books are good or bad, they may work in editorial offices, on publishers’ staffs, in publicity firms, in radio, or in motion pictures. Practically never is such employment granted to a Negro writer though he be as famous as the late James Weldon Johnson or as excellent a craftsman as the living Richard Wright. Perhaps an occasional prize or a fellowship may come a Negro writer’s way—but not a job. Magazine offices, daily newspapers, publishers’ offices are a tightly closed to us in America as if we were pure non-Aryans in Berlin.

6 Of course, Negro novelists do not sell their novels to motion pictures. No motion picture studio in America, in all the history of motion pictures, has yet dared make one single picture using any of the fundamental dramatic values of Negro life—not one. Not one picture. On the screen we are servants, clowns, or fools. Comedy relief. Droll and very funny. Such Negro material as is used by the studios is very rarely written by Negroes.

7 I speak first of this problem of earning a living because it is basic. Most undernourished writers die young—or cease to be writers, because they are forced to do something else.

8 Let us turn to the lecture field, a source of income for many Nordic and Non-Nordic writers who are white. The leading lecture bureaus do not handle Negro speakers. Thousands of women’s clubs and forums have never had—and will not have—a Negro speaker. Since tea is often served, the factor of social equality, of course, enters into the arrangements. In a number of states of our American republic, it is prohibited by law for whites and Negroes to drink tea together in public places.

9 On the lecture tour, the Negro writer, if a tour he has, runs into all the difficulties that beset colored travelers everywhere in this country: in the South the Jim Crow coach and the segregated waiting room. If travelling by car, no tourist camps for Negroes,
few restaurants that will serve a meal. Everywhere lack of hotel accommodations. This week the press reports that Marian Anderson was refused accommodations in the Hotel Lincoln at Springfield [Illinois] where she went to sing at the premiere of Young Mr. Lincoln. Negro writers and artists on tour in this country, if greeted with acclaim on the platform, are often rudely received outside the hall as human beings. They are expected, I suppose, to sleep in stables, if there happen to be no colored families in town to accommodate them.

10 Ten days ago, a friend of mine, a well-known Negro novelist whose third novel has just come from the press, was invited to talk about his book before a large women’s club at their clubhouse. At the hour of the lecture, the novelist could not get past the attendant at the outer door. He was forced to go to the corner drugstore and telephone the ladies that he was on the sidewalk waiting to appear before them. Doormen, you see, and elevator operators accustomed to our segregation patterns, will often not admit Negroes to hotels and clubs even when they say they are specifically invited there as guests. Negroes, in America, whether they be authors or not, are still expected to use the servant’s entrance.

11 When these things are put into a story or book, they are not exotic or charming. There is about them no sweet southern humor—even when told in dialect—so they do not sell well. One of our oldest and most cultural of American magazines once, in turning down a story of mine—which they had a perfect right to turn down on literary grounds—wrote me a quaint little note with it. The editor said, “We believe our readers still read for pleasure.”

12 So, in summary: The market for Negro writers is very limited. Jobs as professional writers, editorial assistants, publisher’s readers, etc., are almost non-existent. Hollywood insofar as Negroes are concerned, might just as well be controlled by Hitler. The common courtesies of decent travel, hotel and restaurant accommodations, politeness from doormen, elevatormen, and hired attendants in public places is practically everywhere in America denied Negroes, whether they be writers or not. Black authors, too, must ride in Jim Crow cars.

13 These are some of our problems. What can you who are writers do to help us solve them? What can you, our public, do to help us solve them? My problem, your problem. No, I am wrong! It is not a matter of mine and yours. We are all Americans. We want to create the American dream, a finer and more democratic America. I cannot do it without you. You cannot do it omitting me. Can we march together then?
Democracy and Me (continued)

14 But perhaps the word march is the wrong word—suggesting soldiers and armies. Can we not put our heads together and think and plan—not merely dream—the future America? And then create it with our hands? A land where even a Negro writer can make a living if he is a good writer. And where, being a Negro, he need not be a secondary American.

15 We do not want any secondary Americans. We do not want a weak and imperfect democracy. We do not want poverty and hunger and prejudice and fear on the part of any portion of our population. We want America to really be America for everybody. Let us make it so!

By permission of Harold Ober Associates Incorporated. Copyright (c) 1973 by the Estate of Langston Hughes.
Read the speech and number each of the paragraphs. Take notes on the following sections:

- **Section I** (Introductory remarks: paragraphs 1–2)

- **Section II** (Problem 1: body paragraphs 3–7)

- **Section III** (Problem 2: body paragraphs 8–11)

- **Section IV** (Summary: body paragraphs 12)

- **Section V** (Questions about what to do: paragraphs 13–14)

- **Section VI** (Solutions and affirmations: paragraph 15)