

Name _____

Date: _____

THEME FOR ENGLISH B

By Langston Hughes, 1951

The instructor said,
Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you---
Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple?
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.
I am the only colored student in my class.

The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:
hear you, hear me---we two---you, me, talk on this page.
(I hear New York too.) Me---who?
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records---Bessie, bop, or Bach.
I guess being colored doesn't make me NOT like
the same things other folks like who are other races.
So will my page be colored that I write?
Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white---
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American.
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
But we are, that's true!
As I learn from you,
I guess you learn from me---
although you're older---and white---
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

1. What is the purpose of the instructor's assignment?

2. Does the poem rhyme?

Why might Hughes have made these choices?

3. How does the narrator define himself?

Why does he do this?

4. Find an example of alliteration and highlight it.

5. In what sense are the student and the instructor a part of one another?

6. What is the theme of this poem?

Langston Hughes was an American poet, novelist, and playwright whose African-American themes made him a primary contributor to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.



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INCIDENT

By Countee Cullen, 1925

Once riding in old Baltimore,
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
I saw a Baltimorean
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,
And he was no whit bigger,
And so I smiled, but he poked out
His tongue, and called me, 'Nigger.'

I saw the whole of Baltimore
From May until December;
Of all the things that happened there
That's all that I remember.

How can you connect this to your daily life?

1. What does the word incident mean?

2. How old might the speaker be now?

Why do you think that?

3. How does the author make the two boys seem similar?

4. Why does the author capitalize the word "Nigger"?

What is the effect of this word on the poem?

5. How does the mood change from beginning to end?

Writer Countee Cullen was an iconic figure of the Harlem Renaissance, known for his poetry, fiction and plays. He was recognized as an award-winning poet by his high school years. He published his acclaimed debut volume of poetry, *Color*, in 1925, which would be followed by *Copper Sun* and *The Ballad of the Brown Girl*. Also a noted novelist, playwright and children's author, Cullen later worked as a high school teacher.



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AMERICA

By Claude McKay, 1921

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth.
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
Giving me strength erect against her hate,
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.

Yet, as a rebel fronts a king in state,
I stand within her walls with not a shred
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.

Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,
And see her might and granite wonders there,
Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,
Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand

Overall, is this poem positive or negative?

What evidence is in the text to support your answer?



Claude McKay was a Jamaican poet best known for his novels and poems, including "If We Must Die," which contributed to the Harlem Renaissance.

1. Based on the title, what do you think this poem is going to be about?

2. What **literary device** is being employed here?

Go through and highlight every time America is referred to as a woman.

Why does the author use this device?

3. Does the poem rhyme?

Is there a pattern?

4. Why does the speaker love "this cultured hell"?

5. Why might she have "hate" for the speaker?

6. List three things America is compared to:

7. What are the priceless treasures the speaker is mentioning?

Why is he gazing at them **darkly**?

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IF WE MUST DIE

By Claude Mckay, 1921

What is the poem
saying?

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.

If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!

What though before us lies the open grave?

Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,

Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

What is the author
doing?