

COLLEGE GUILD
PO Box 6448, Brunswick ME 04011

POETRY CLUB-2, UNIT 2

THE HARLEM POETS

Claude McKay 1889-1948, born in Jamaica, was the first major poet of the Harlem Renaissance and influenced many black poets. He also wrote poems like the sonnet “If We Must Die,” recited by Winston Churchill in a speech denouncing the Nazis, as well as acclaimed poems in the Jamaican dialect, evoking his love for life in his native country in language that is authentic, rhythmical and vivid.

THE TIRED WORKER

O whisper, O my soul! The afternoon
Is waning into evening, whisper soft!
Peace, O my rebel heart! For soon the moon
From out its misty veil will swing aloft!
Be patient, weary body, soon the night
Will wrap thee gently in her sable sheet,
And with a leaden sigh thou wilt invite
To rest thy tired hands and aching feet
The wretched day was theirs, the night is mine;
Come tender sleep, and fold me to thy breast.
But what steals out the gray clouds red like wine?
O dawn! O dreaded dawn! O let me rest
Weary my veins, my brain, my life! Have pity!
No! Once again the harsh, the ugly city.

1. Can you imagine what the worker's life is like in the city after reading this poem? Describe it as you see it. Everyone may have a different picture, but everyone can probably relate to the speaker's feelings.
2. Find two places where McKay uses metaphorical language, comparing two things without using the words *as* or *like*. Do you think these sections work well? Why or why not.
3. What rhyme scheme does McKay use, i.e. every two lines, every other line? Does he use this scheme consistently throughout the poem?
4. Write a poem about an emotion, like joy, sadness, fear, anger incorporating metaphors that concretely convey your feelings.

Audre Lorde, (1934-1992), was born of West Indian parents in Harlem, dedicated her life and creative talent to addressing injustices with passion, perception, depth of feeling. She said, "I have a duty to speak the truth as I see it." Many of her poems express anger and outrage and contain many painful images. She said she needed to write poems in order to speak. Here are two of her poems that point to more peaceful possibilities in the future:

BEVERLY'S POEM

I don't need to be rich
 just able
 to know how it feels
 to get bored
 with anemones. *

**(One definition is a shelled creature that lives in the sea.)*

5. What is Lorde saying in this poem?
6. Do you think she is being ironic, using words to express something other than or the opposite of the literal meaning? Why or why not?
7. Is it possible she is playing with words when she uses the word *anemones*, and might have another word that rhymes with anemones in mind? What might that word be?

FOR JUDITH

Hanging out
 means being
 together
 upon the earth
 boulders
 crape myrtle trees*
 fox and deer
 at the watering hole
 not quite together
 but learning
 each other's ways.

*(*an East Indian shrub widely grown in warm regions for its flowers)*

8. What do you think this poem means? Back your answer up by using quotes from the poem.

9. Write a poem about what hanging out is to you, using very concrete images as Lourde has in the poem above.

asha bandele is a poet and educator. She married a man she met in prison when reading her poems there during Black History Month. She is a spoken word performer and lectures around the world. The following is the beginning of a much longer poem.

no turn backs

c my people
 dressed in black
 u know we come a long way
 & we ain't turning back
 wade in the water
 wade in the water children

wade in the water

u know my God is gonna trouble these waters 4 me*

until all Afrikan people are free*

*(*refers to a story in the Bible about an angel troubling/stirring the waters in a healing*

the pool at Bethesda.)

10. What does this poem mean to you? Does it touch you emotionally?

bandele has used local dialect in her poem, perhaps in the way language was spoken when and where she grew up. Writing in dialect can be a very powerful way of immersing a reader in an unfamiliar but very interesting environment. blande has also used short hand letters for words.

11. Write a poem in the language – vocabulary, diction, etc. – that you spoke at home and/or with your friends. If you think the language you used didn't have a touch of dialect, just write in the language you grew up with, or you can even make one up.

Gil Scott- Heron, 1949-2011, was an American soul and jazz poet, one of the originators of hip-hop. He struggled publically with substance abuse in the 2000's and spent the early part of the decade in and out of jail on drug possession charges. After his death, he was awarded the Gammy Life Time Achievement Award in 2012. He is best known for the spoken word poems, especially, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." Here is the beginning of this long poem:

You will not be able to stay home brother

You will not be able to plug in, turn on and drop out

You will not be able to lose yourself on skag or skip

Skip out for a beer during commercials

Because the revolution will not be televised.

The revolution will not be brought to you by Xerox

In 4 parts without commercial interruptions

They will be no show pictures of Nixon

Blowing a bugle and leading a charge by John Mitchell
 General Abrams and Spiro Agnew* to eat
 Hog maws** confiscated from Harlem sanctuaries

(*political and military officials of the time) (**soul food)

12. How does the poet make his words relevant to our lives and our society? Which lines were most effective in conveying his message?

Angelina Weld Grinke, born in 1880, was another pivotal poet in the Harlem Resistance.

EVANESANCE*

You are like pale flower
 In the blue spring dusk

You are like a yellow star
 Budding and blowing
 In an apricot sky
 You are like the beauty

Of a voice
 After death
 You are like thin, white petals
 Falling
 And
 Floating
 Down
 Upon the white stilled hushing

Of my soul.

*(*the process of dissipating like vapor)*

- 13. Ginke has used four similes in this poem. From her words, what is your impression of the person she is addressing the poem to?**
- 14. Do you think “Evanescence” is a good title for the poem? Why or why not?**
- 15. Write a poem about someone using four different similes in descriptive sentence to describe them like Ginke has.**

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes