

**JAH KENTE**  
**INTERNATIONAL**

# Jah Kente International Youth Theatre: Study Guide of The Redemption Ritual



## Jah Kente International

This a study guide titled Redemption Ritual: This guide is an anthology of poems which trace African-American presence from pre-captivity to the present. Students will learn to analyze and bring these poems to life through arts integrated lesson plans and dramatic presentations in the classroom and on stage.

Jah Kente International®, Inc.  
Phone: ( 2 0 2 ) 8 2 9 - 1 1 6 0  
Fax ( 2 0 2 ) 217-4273



# Jah Kente International Youth Theatre: Study Guide

## Redemption Ritual

Connecting Communities through Words, Stories and Traditions in the Arts



<b>T H E  S A N K O F A  P R O J E C T</b>	Co-facilitating Teacher Directed Reading/Writing Component:	Enrichment Component	Instructors Directed Historical/Theatrical Component:
	<p>CCS Standards for English Language Arts &amp; Literacy in History/ Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects</p> <p>CCSS – Read accurately, use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding ➤ <i>Above grade-level words used in context</i></p> <p><b>Goal of Collaboration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Jah Kente International’s Redemption Rituals reverberates with the cycle of human history and promotes understanding of American experience through arts education and performance.</li><li>➤ Students will learn how to identify the morale lessons and present them in D.C. Public Schools through historical studies and heartfelt live theatrical performances.</li></ul>	<p>Core Curriculum State Standards Goals &amp; Objectives</p> <p>CCSS – Interpret figurative language and nuances in word meaning, including similes, metaphors, and personifications.</p> <p><b>GRADE LEVEL:</b></p> <p><b>Duration:</b></p> <p><b>HIGHLIGHT ACTIVITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Cross Cultural Studies and tours with curators.</li><li>➤ The actors of Redemption Ritual prepare students to perform in multiple arenas, including international tours.</li></ul>	<p>CCS Standards access point: text complexity connected to introducing, creating, and performing compositions to enhance learning.</p> <p>CCSS – Create narratives or write to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. ➤ <i>In the text or a portion of the text</i></p> <p><b>Main Focus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ The Redemption Rituals uses poetry and the elements of theatrical performance to teach students how to tell a show on stage, as well as write and create their own stories; addressing several of the newly adopted Common Core State Standards.</li><li>➤ Students will create a theatrical performance for an assigned story line, based upon original narratives accompanied by music and other theatrical properties, such as lighting, props, design, characterization and appropriate costuming.</li></ul>



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## INSTRUCTOR'S NOTES

This guide will address standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/ Social Studies, Science and Technology-based Subjects. Participating students will learn how to further develop and enhance habits of the mind and apply them to various aspects of their academic and social lives through arts education and theatrical performance.

**Overall Course/ Program Objective:** Students will learn how to use the elements of theatrical expression to create drama, as well as original dramas on stage. Students will learn how to acquire and use 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as creativity, imagination, problem solving, media literacy, IT literacy, cross cultural learning and structure, by exercising key characteristics and habits of the mind, including but not limited to: compare and contrast, variety of expression, questioning, abstract and concrete thinking, applying prior and newly acquired knowledge, making predictions, creating new productions, designing, analyzing, word structure, collaborative actions, sequencing and imagery.

The anthology of poems presented primarily serve to exemplify the level of complexity, quality and range are related to core standards that require all students in any given grade band to engage. Additionally, they are suggestive critical thinking and higher level skilled based text that students should encounter in the text types required by the Standards. The choices should serve as useful guideposts in help select texts of similar complexity, quality, and range for desired classroom settings.

## Redemption Ritual: Summary

“Redemption Ritual is produced by Jah Kente International is a staged choreo-poetic presentation of classical African-American poems by leading Harlem Renaissance figures Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Robert Hayden, Margaret Walker, Richard Wright, James Weldon Johnson and Sterling A. Brown stringing together to moving effect the common narrative of the African American experience from captivity to the present.



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## HERITAGE

COUNTEE CULLEN

From "Countee Cullen's 'Heritage': A Black Waste Land." *South Atlantic Bulletin* 36.4 (1971)

[http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a\\_f/cullen/heritage.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/cullen/heritage.htm)

### POEM

#### STANZA I

WHAT IS AFRICA TO ME:  
COPPER SUN OR SCARLET SEA,  
JUNGLE STAR OR JUNGLE TRACK,  
STRONG BRONZED MEN, OR REGAL BLACK  
WOMEN FROM WHOSE LOINS I SPRANG  
WHEN THE BIRDS OF EDEN SANG?  
*ONE THREE CENTURIES REMOVED  
FROM THE SCENES HIS FATHERS LOVED,  
SPICY GROVE, CINNAMON TREE,  
WHAT IS AFRICA TO ME?*

#### STANZA II

SO I LIE, WHO ALL DAY LONG  
WANT NO SOUND EXCEPT THE SONG  
SUNG BY WILD BARBARIC BIRDS  
GOADING MASSIVE JUNGLE HERDS,  
JUGGERNAUTS OF FLESH THAT PASS  
TRAMPLING TALL DEFIANT GRASS  
WHERE YOUNG FOREST LOVERS LIE,  
PLIGHTING TROTH BENEATH THE SKY.  
SO I LIE, WHO ALWAYS HEAR,  
THOUGH I CRAM AGAINST MY EAR  
BOTH MY THUMBS, AND KEEP THEM THERE,  
GREAT DRUMS THROBBING THROUGH THE AIR.  
WITH THE DARK BLOOD DAMNED WITHIN  
LIKE GREAT PULSING TIDES OF WINE  
THAT, I FEAR, MUST BURST THE FINE  
CHANNELS OF THE CHAFING NET  
WHERE THEY SURGE AND FOAM AND FRET.

#### STANZA III

AFRICA? A BOOK ONE THUMBS  
LISTLESSLY, TILL SLUMBER COMES.  
UNREMEMBERED ARE HER BATS  
CIRCLING THROUGH THE NIGHT, HER CATS  
*CROUCHING IN THE RIVER REEDS*

### COMMENTARY

"Heritage" opens in the interrogative, posing a question about the significance of the African continent to Cullen, offering hypothetical answers that have their basis in myths and stereotypes. In the remaining stanzas, toward the end of this poem Cullen expresses his unhappiness: "Must my heart grow sick and falter,/ Wishing He I served were Black,". These lines give an impression that Cullen is unhappy where he is now and wishes that his life was different. It also suggests the cruelty that is felt by African-Americans.

Author expresses the significance of the persona spending his days recumbent, dreaming of the sights and sounds of his native country. His African heritage preoccupies him; yet, because he must conform to the dictates of a predominantly white culture that is not concerned with his ethnic origins, he is forced to deny the primitive rhythms that pulse through his body:

2<sup>nd</sup> stanza ends with an image of the conflict between his "fount of pride," his consciousness of his heritage, and the social strictures which are imposed upon him.

In a temporal sense, many of these verses point in both directions. In the first place, they point to the past, in that he recalls the method of entrapment used against the original slaves.

In addition, the image is prophetic as well insofar as it foreshadows the reawakening of black pride that took place in this country in the 1960's.

There is an implication that society, for its own safety, must insist that the majority of its members function in regular, cyclical patterns. The persona realized that, if he is to do this, he had better disengage himself from the contemplations of his origins.



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BY THE RIVER BRINK; NO MORE  
DOES THE BUGLE-THROATED ROAR  
CRY THAT MONARCH CLAWS HAVE LEAPT  
FROM THE SCABBARDS WHERE THEY SLEPT.  
SILVER SNAKES THAT ONCE A YEAR  
DOFF THE LOVELY COATS YOU WEAR,  
SEEK NO COVERT IN YOUR FEAR  
LEST A MORTAL EYE SHOULD SEE;  
WHAT'S YOUR NAKEDNESS TO ME?

HERE NO BODIES SLEEK AND WET,  
DRIPPING MINGLED RAIN AND SWEAT,  
TREAD THE SAVAGE MEASURES OF  
JUNGLE BOYS AND GIRLS IN LOVE.  
WHAT IS LAST YEAR'S SNOW TO ME,  
LAST YEAR'S ANYTHING? .  
... THE TREE  
BUDDING YEARLY MUST FORGET  
HOW ITS PAST AROSE OR SET.

#### STANZA IV

SO I LIE, WHO NEVER QUITE  
SAFELY SLEEP FROM RAIN AT NIGHT—  
I CAN NEVER REST AT ALL  
WHEN THE RAIN BEGINS TO FALL;  
LIKE A SOUL GONE MAD WITH PAIN  
I MUST MATCH ITS WEIRD REFRAIN.

#### STANZA V

QUAINT, OUTLANDISH HEATHEN GODS  
BLACK MEN FASHION OUT OF RODS,  
CLAY, AND BRITTLE BITS OF STONE,  
IN A LIKENESS LIKE THEIR OWN.  
MY CONVERSION CAME HIGH PRICED;  
I BELONG TO JESUS CHRIST,  
PREACHER OF HUMILITY;  
HEATHEN GODS ARE NAUGHT TO ME.

#### STANZA VI

EVER AT THY GLOWING ALTAR  
MUST MY HEAD GROW SICK AND FALTER,  
WISHING HE I SERVED WERE BLACK,  
THINKING THEN IT WOULD NOT LACK  
PRECEDENT OF PAIN TO GUIDE IT,

*He must have no past, only a present; the more closely he resembles a tree—a mindless organism which functions according to a predictable pattern—the better. Here Cullen turns a natural image against the persona in order to indicate the full desperation of his plight.*

*In this piece there are other implications that the persona is closely allied with natural forces, as some of the images previously discussed have indicated. Too, this alliance is one that dates back to the very beginnings of his race, as he vaguely senses: "In an old remembered way / Rain works on me night and day."*

*The author also deals with the pagan deities of Africa in the final line of stanza 5, as well as the familiar yet (by now) somewhat hollow disclaimer pertaining to the persona of his heritage.*

*As we shall see in the next stanza, the persona, like his forebears, does indeed fashion a deity in a likeness that is similar to his own.*

*In the sixth stanza the persona appears to address the son of God directly. The persona's point is well taken. The Biblical Christ is referred to as a "man of sorrows," and certainly the black, by nature of his status in a white culture, is a man of sorrows in a secular sense.*

*If blackness and suffering are so closely related in the persona's mind, then his Christ perforce must be a black one.*

*In the lines that follow, the persona again makes clear the relation between himself and his past as he emulates the iconographic activity of his ancestors.*

*Thus, unable to practice the lost religion of his forefathers and equally unable to worship the white man's Christ, the persona has taken the significant features of the two public modes of worship and has made from them a private variety.*

*His black Christ is a personal synthesis of the heathen god and the Christian one.*





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LET WHO WOULD OR MIGHT DERIDE IT;  
SURELY THEN THIS FLESH WOULD KNOW  
YOURS HAD BORNE A KINDRED WOE.  
EVER AT THY GLOWING ALTAR  
MUST MY HEAD GROW SICK AND FALTER,  
WISHING HE I SERVED WERE BLACK,  
THINKING THEN IT WOULD NOT LACK  
PRECEDENT OF PAIN TO GUIDE IT,  
LET WHO WOULD OR MIGHT DERIDE IT;  
SURELY THEN THIS FLESH WOULD KNOW  
YOURS HAD BORNE A KINDRED WOE.

#### STANZA VII

ALL DAY LONG AND ALL NIGHT THROUGH  
ONE THING ONLY MUST I DO:  
QUENCH MY PRIDE AND COOL MY BLOOD,  
LEST I PERISH IN THE FLOOD.  
LEST A HIDDEN EMBER SET  
TIMBER THAT I THOUGH WAS WET  
BURNING LIKE THE DRIEST FLAX...  
NOR YET HAS MY HEART OR HEAD  
IN THE LEAST WAY REALIZED  
THEY AND I ARE CIVILIZED.

*The central image of the flood, mentioned in the second and fourth stanzas, is mentioned again, as are the fears of the persona that the flood of pride will burst forth and overwhelm him, washing away the props of whatever stability he may have acquired.*

*He recognizes, however, that there is danger from another quarter as well.*

*Final lines reveal an ominous suggestion that the forces of pride and frustration (which are antithetical, as the images of fire and water suggest) may cancel each other out and destroy the persona, who is caught in the middle.*

**Summary:** Cullen begins with a question concerning the nature of an abstract and rather remote Africa. He then lists some concrete images which serve as specific foci for his speculations: sun and sea, sky and earth, man and woman. The fact that the next few lines are italicized indicates a shift of viewpoint as the persona turns inward and makes an attempt to place himself subjectively in relation to his heritage. However, having considered all the ramifications—external and internal, public and private, tangible and intangible—he still has no answer to his question, and so he poses it once more in the last line. The rest of the poem represents his attempt at an answer.

**Character List:** Sun Dancer; Scarlet Sea Dancer; Jungle Star/Track Dancers; 3+ Males; 3+ Females; 2+ Birds; Slave Master

**Glossary Terms:** Africa; Regal; Eden; Scene; Grove

**Major Themes:** ·The nature of Africa ·The attempt to reconnect

**Quotes and Analysis:** Have students work collaboratively in groups, research the poem and prepare analysis of specific quotes from the poem.

**Essay Question(s):** What is Africa to you? Is Africa a blend of colors? Is it a jungle or an Eden? Does Africa have special stars, paths and scents?

**Internet Connection Activity:** Have students work independently to gather data and images from the internet about the poem.

**Formative Assessment:** Power Point Presentation; Graphic Organizers; Play Wright; Theatrical Presentation; Create an original story based upon major theme



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## AFRO-AMERICAN FRAGMENT

### LANGSTON HUGHES

Publication Information Not Available

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-vintage-hughes/chapanal030.html>

#### POEM

SO LONG  
SO FAR AWAY  
IS AFRICA.

NOT EVEN MEMORIES ALIVE  
SAVE THOSE THAT HISTORY BOOKS CREATE,  
BEAT BACK INTO THE BLOOD-  
BEAT OUT OF BLOOD WITH WORDS SAD-SUNG  
IN STRANGE UN-NEGRO TONGUE –

SO LONG,  
SO FAR AWAY  
IS AFRICA.

SUBDUE AND TIME LOST  
ARE THE DRUMS – AND YET  
THROUGH SOME VAST MIST OF RACE  
THERE COMES THIS SONG  
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND,  
THIS SONG OF ATAVISTIC LAND  
OF BITTER YEARNINGS LOST  
WITHOUT A PLACE

SO LONG  
SO FAR AWAY  
IS AFRICA'S  
DARK FACE.

#### COMMENTARY

*This poem represents many literary elements and may be categorized as free-verse.  
In lines 1-3; 10-12; and 20-23 the poet Hughes uses repetition.*

*In lines 5, 6, 7 & 8 he wonderful use of alliteration – (occurrences of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words).*

- Save **those that** history books create,
- Save **those that** songs
- **Beat back** into the **blood-**
- **Beat out of blood** with words sad sung.

*In lines 9, 15, and 19 he uses consonance – (repetition of the same consonant two or more times in short succession).*

- Line 9: In **strange, un-**Negro **ton**gue-
- Line 15: Through some **vast mist of race**
- Line 19: Of **bit**ter yearning **lost**

*In lines 5 & 6 he uses parallelism – (the use of components in a sentence that are grammatically the same; or similar in their construction, sound, meaning or meter).*

- **Save those** that history books create,
- **Save those** that songs.

*In lines 14-16, 17 & 18 uses assonance – (takes place when two or more words close to one another repeat the same vowel sound but start with different consonant sound).*

- Lines 14-16: Are the **drums**-and yet
- Through **some** vast mist of race
- **Comes** this song.
- Lines 17 and 18: I do **not** understand
- This **song** of atavistic land

**Summary:** Africa is described as long and far away. The memories of African-Americans are dead, except for those that are created by history books or



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beaten into the blood by songs sung in a tongue that is not the native tongue of these displaced peoples. The fragment of the title refers not only to the poem itself but to the fragmented histories of black Americans. Their connection to Africa is severed for all practical purposes, so that blacks can recover a semblance of a connection only through the fictions and approximations of history books or through the sentiment hard-won through the Gospel and blues music of black Americans. This music beats memory back into the blood, and the process is described as a painful one. This poem is itself a kind of dirge for a homeland lost.

**Character list:** 3 Dancers; 1 Daydreamer; 1 Slave Driver; 3 Singers; 3 Drummers;

**Glossary Terms:** Africa; Memories; Subdued; Vast; Atavistic; Yearning

**Major Themes:** ·A displaced people ·A homeland lost

**Quotes & Analysis:** Have students work collaboratively in groups, research the poem and prepare analysis of specific quotes from the poem.

**Essay Question:** Topical/ Open Forum

**Internet Connection Activity:** Have students work independently to gather data and images from the internet about the poem.

**Formative Assessment:** Power Point Presentation; Graphic Organizers; Play Wright; Theatrical Presentation; Create an original story based upon major theme

## MIDDLE PASSAGE

ROBERT HAYDEN

Robert Hayden, “Middle Passage” from *Collected Poems*. Copyright © 1962, 1966 by Robert Hayden.

<http://jtolle.wordpress.com/2011/12/10/structures-of-irony-in-robert-haydens-middle-passage/>

### POEM

I

JESUS, ESTRELLA, ESPERANZA, MERCY:  
SAILS FLASHING TO THE WIND LIKE WEAPONS,  
SHARKS FOLLOWING THE MOANS THE FEVER AND THE DYING;  
HORROR THE CORPOSANT AND COMPASS ROSE.

MIDDLE PASSAGE:  
VOYAGE THROUGH DEATH  
TO LIFE UPON THESE SHORES.

APRIL 1800 –

### COMMENTARY

*Robert Hayden's “Middle Passage” (1962) begins in guilt, in mordant irony; the poetic voice subordinated to a summoned reality of injustice: a litany of slave-ship names: “Jesús, Estrella, Esperanza, Mercy.”*

*Now, structurally, that opening salvo of themes and strategies — ‘guilt’ and ‘irony’ and ‘subordination’ — is essential to Hayden’s ultimate and eminently rhetorical purpose throughout the poem: the attempt to construct a narrative in “Middle Passage” in such*





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BLACKS REBELLIOUS. CREW UNEASY. OUR LINGUIST SAYS  
THEIR MOANING IS A PRAYER FOR DEATH.  
OURS AND THEIR OWN. SOME TRY TO STARVE THEMSELVES.  
LOST THREE THIS MORNING LEAPED WITH CRAZY LAUGHTER  
TO THE WAITING SHARKS, SANG AS THEY WENT UNDER.

DERISER, ADVENTRUE, TARTAR, ANN:  
STANDING TO AMERICA, BRINGING HOME  
BLACK GOLD, BALCK IVOORY, BLACK SEED.

DEEP IN THE FESTERING HOLD THY FATHER LIES,  
OF HIS BONES NEW ENGLAND PEWS ARE MADE,  
THOSE ARE ALTAR LIGHTS THAT WERE HIS EYES.

JESUS SAVIOUR PILOT ME  
OVER LIFE'S TEMPESTOUS SEA.

WE PRAY THAT THOU WILT GRANT, O LORD,  
SAFE PASSAGE TO OUR VESSELS BRINGING  
HEATHEN SOULS UNTO THY CHASTENING.

JESUS SAVIOR

8 BELLS. I CANNOT SLEEP, FOR I AM SICK  
WITH FEAR, BUT WRITING EASES FEAR A LITTLE  
SINCE STILL MY EYES CAN SEE THESE WORDS TAKE SHAPE  
UPON THE PAGE & SO I WRITE, AS ONE  
WOULD TURN TO EXORCISM. 4 DAYS SCUDDING,  
BUT NOW THE SEA IS CALM AGAIN. MISFORTUNE  
FOLLOWS IN OUR WAKE LIKE SHARDS (OUR GRINNING  
TUTLARY GODS). WHICH ONE OF US  
HAS KILLED AN ALBATROSS? A PLAGUE AMONG  
OUR BLACKS – OPHTHALMIA: BLINDNESS – & WE  
HAVE JETTISONED THE BLIND TO NO AVAIL.  
IT SPREADS, THE TERRIFYING SICKNESS SPREADS.  
ITS CLAWS HAVE SCRATCHED SIGHT FROM THE CAPT.'S EYES  
& THERE IS BLINDNESS IN THE FO'C'SLE  
& WE MUST SAIL 3 WEEKS BEFORE WE COME TO PORT.

WHAT PORT AWAITS US, DAVY JONES'  
OR HOME? I'VE HEARD OF SLAVERS DRIFTING, DRIFTING,  
PLAYTHINGS OF WIND AND STORM AND CHANCE,  
THEIR CREWS GONE BLIND, THE JUNGLE HATRED  
CRAWLING UP ON DECK.

*a way that the “history of slavers” accuses, incriminates, and condemns itself.*

*Only after the hypocrisy, viciousness, and criminality of Puritan and slave-trade rationalization and practice is made glaringly apparent to the reader does Hayden allow an unchecked reflection of the poetic voice to emerge, one which will, ostensibly, draw forth connections from a debris of historical material to create sustained and redemptive meaning—it is a voice we scramble to trust, cast-out, as we are, among the foundered, rotting remains of ribs and keels.*

*This section appears to have been inspired by an actual document Hayden encountered, also announces its subjective and poetic value in its reference to the “albatross” — a motif in poetry linked to Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” — and to “Ophthalmia: blindness” — a trenchant reversal of Christ’s healing of the blind, in this context. Undoubtedly, any literary work comprised of or derived from historical sources necessarily makes a polemical gesture in its exclusions and inclusions, and the extremely compact nature of “Middle Passage” seems to suggest a kind of curtailing and truncation particularly conducive to Hayden’s rhetorical intentions.*

*This first section primarily involved in opening up the poem to its historical, moral, and individual dimensions. Thus, of all three sections, this first invokes the largest polity of voices: shipmate’s journal, Puritan hymns, court deposition, prayer, slave-ship names, the poet’s own voice, and two italicized sections of ambiguous origin.*



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**THOU WHO WALKED ON GALILEE**

**DEPONENT FURTHER SAYETH THE BELLA J  
LEFT THE GUINEA COAST  
WITH CARGO OF FIVE HUNDRED BLACKS AND ODD  
FOR THE BARRACOONS OF FLORIDA:**

**THAT THRE WAS HARDLY ROOM 'TWEEN-DECKS FOR HALF  
THE SWELTERING CATTLE STOWED SPOON-FASHION THERE;  
THAT SOME WENT MAD OF THIRST AND TORE THEIR FLESH  
AND SUCKED THE BLOOD:**

**THAT CREW AND CAPTAIN LUSTED WITH THE COMLIEST  
OF THE SAVAGE GIRLS KEPT NAKED IN THE CABINS;  
THAT THERE WAS ONE THEY CALLED THE GUINEA ROSE  
AND THEY CAST LOST AND FOUGHT TO LIE WITH HER:**

**THAT WHEN THE BO'S'N PIPED ALL HANDS, THE FLAMES  
SPREADING FROM STARBOARD ALREADY WERE BEYOND  
CONTROL, THE NEGROES HOWLING AND THEIR CHAINS  
ENTANGLED WITH THE FLAMES:**

**THAT THE BURNING BLACKS COULD NOT BE READED,  
THAT THE CREW ABANDONED SHIP,  
LEAVING THEIR SHRIEKING NEGRESSES BEHIND,  
THAT THE CAPTAIN PERISHED DRUNKEN WITH THE WENCHES:**

**FURTHER DEPONENT SAYETH NOT.**

**PILOT OH PILOT ME**

**II**

**AYE, LAD, AND I HAVE SEEN THOSE FACTORIES,  
GAMBIA, RIO PONGO, CALABAR;  
HAVE WATCHED THE ARTFUL MONGOS BAITING TRAPS  
OF WAR WHEREIN THE VICTOR AND THE VANQUISHED**

**WERE CAUGHT AS PRIZES FOR OUR BARRACOONS.  
HAVE SEEN THE NIGGER KINGS WHOSE VANITY  
AND GREED TURNED WILD BLACK HIDES OF FELLATAH,  
MANDINGO, IBO, KRU TO GOLD FOR US.**

*Furthermore, Hayden's purpose for the first section of "Middle Passage" concerns the introduction of two key elements, besides the apparent historical narrative: (1) Pervasive, disarming irony and (2) the "court-room" voice. Both are revived in the third and last section only to be inverted and redeemed by Hayden.*

*Now, the second section of this poem can be seen as Hayden's highly controlled concession to the historical voices of pirates and/or merchants who participated in and defended the slave-trade.*

*The sick-bed-ridden merchant, for instance, whose monologue this section describes the 'barbarity' of a certain "King Anthracite" towards people presumably of his own race, emphasizing that the King did so for mere "trinkets" and "tin crowns".*

*In essence, he indirectly champions the belief that those Africans were of a lesser moral integrity and basic decency, perhaps fundamentally less human, than those who came to evangelize or, in this case, capture and enslave them (though, as Hayden has shown, the two are not mutually exclusive).*

*But, in another turn of Hayden's sharp irony, what emerges most conspicuously is the speaker's own unrepentant inhumanity towards the people he bought and sold. He calls "Gambia, Rio Pongo, Calabar" "factories" (which actually doubles as a historically accurate term for "a merchant company's trading station" (OED) and the myriad communities of African lands "black fields" to be "harvested" for wealth.*

*It is he and his cohorts who, in fact, incite "King Anthracite" to "kill the sick and old" and "burn the sleeping villages," despite what baubles he chooses to do so for. And all this as the speaker is dying, still profoundly ignorant of the death he has conveyed for "twenty years."*

*Hayden continues to elaborate upon previously stated viewpoints that are twofold: (1) Hayden uses the language of slaveholders (or what we readers are supposed to take as an honest representation thereof), to indict the slaveholders themselves, as he did in the first section with the Puritans, and therefore it acts as a furtherance of his pervasive irony, and, more importantly.*



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AND THERE WAS ONE – KING ANTHRACITE WE NAME HIM –  
FETISH FACE BENEATH FRENCH PARASOLS  
OF BRASS AND ORANGE VELVET, IMPUDENT MOUTH  
WHOSE CUPS WERE CARVEN SKULLS OF ENEMIES:

HE'D HONOR US WITH DRUM AND FEAST AND CONJO  
AND PALM-OIL-GLISTENING WENCHES DEFT IN LOVE,  
AND FOR TIN CROWNS THAT SHONE WITH PASTE,  
RED CALICO AND GERMAN-SILVER TRINKETS

WOULD HAVE THE DRUMS TALK WAR AND SEND  
HIS WARRIORS TO BURN THE SLEEPING VILLAGES  
AND KILL THE SICK AND OLD AND LEAD THE YOUNG  
IN COFFLES TO OUR FACTORIES.

TWENTY YEARS A TRADER, TWENTY YEARS,  
FOR THERE WAS WEALTH APLENTRY TO BE HARVESTED  
FROM THOSE BLACK FIELDS, AND I'D BE TRADING STILL  
BUT FOR THE FEVERS MELTING DOWN MY BONES.

### III

SHUTTLES IN THE ROCKING LOOM OF HISTORY,  
THE DARK SHIPS MOVE, THE DARK SHIPS MOVE,  
THEIR BRIGHT IRONICAL NAMES  
LIKE JEST OF KINDNESS ON A MURDERERS MOUTH;  
PLOUGH THROUGH THRASHING GLISTER TOWARD  
FATA MORGANA'S LUSCENT MELTING SHORE,  
WEAVE TOWARD NEW WORLD LITTORALS THAT ARE  
MIRAGE AND MYTH AND ACTUAL SHORE.

VOYAGE THROUGH DEATH,  
VOYAGE WHOSE CHARTINGS ARE UNLOVE.

A CHARNEL STENCH EFFLUVIUM OF LIVING DEATH  
SPREADS OUTWARD FROM THE HOLD,  
WHERE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD, THE HORRIBLY DYING,  
LIE INTERLOCKED, LIE FOUL WITH BLOOD AND EXCREMENT.

DEEP IN THE FESTERING HOLD THY FATHER LIES,  
THE CORPSE OF MERCY ROTS WITH HIM,  
RATS EAT LOVE'S ROTTEN GELID EYES.

BUT OH THE LIVING LOOK AT YOU

*(2) he gives free rein to a voice in the history of the slave-trade, one that is unmediated, uninterrupted, and more self-contained than anything else in this poem.*

*The second point allows Hayden to step in, effectively, with the 'contemporary' poetic voice in this third section, because, since he has restrained himself, we have already been able to see history itself indict history, instead of listening to the poet rail and rave against it.*

*Obviously the first and second point are integrally linked, because it is that pervasive irony which, within the context of the poem, unmoors and destabilizes the narrative of an "acceptable" slave-trade and makes the 'contemporary voice' a viable interpreter and commentator, despite its emergence in a different era in history.*

*Later on in this final section Hayden introduces the fierce envisioning of Josphe Cinqué's rebellion on the Amistad, its evocation of the court-case United States,*

*Appellants, v. Cinque, and Others, Africans, which will eventually uphold and defend the actions of the latter, and the reversal of certain ironic tropes used in the poem, the third section of "Middle Passage", then, becomes the redemptive final chapter, one which, Hayden, writing during the most heated period of the Civil Rights Movement, might have felt especially necessary.*

*As was mentioned earlier, the first section of "Middle Passage" brings to the fore key issues to be resolved in this last section. Perhaps most ingeniously, Cinqué (or Cinquez, here) is subtly turned into a Christ-figure, but one significantly different from (maybe opposed to) the classic model.*

*The relation hinges on the word "transfigure," from which a connection may be*



# Jah Kente International Youth Theatre: Study Guide

## Redemption Ritual

### Connecting Communities through Words, Stories and Traditions in the Arts



WITH HUMAN EYES WHOSE SUFFERING ACCUSES YOU,  
WHOSE HATRED REACHES THROUGH THE SWILL OF DARK  
TO STRIKE YOU LIKE A LEAPER'S CLAW.

YOU CANNOT STARE THAT HATRED DOWN  
OR CHAIN THE FEAR THAT STALKS THE WATCHES  
AND BREATHES ON YOU ITS FETID SCORCHING BREATH;  
CANNOT KILL THE DEEP IMMORTAL HUMAN WISH.  
THE TIMELESS WILL.

BUT FOR THE STORM THAT FLUNG UP BARRIERS  
OF WIND AND WAVE, THE AMISTAD, SENORES,  
WOULD HAVE REACHED THE PORT OF PRINCIPE IN TWO,  
THREE DAYS AT MOST; BUT FOR THE STORM WE SHOULD  
HAVE BEEN PREPARED FOR WHAT BEFELL.  
SWIFT AS THE PUMA'S LEAP IT CAME. THERE WAS  
THAT INTERVAL OF MOONLESS CALM FILLED ONLY  
WITH THE WATER'S AND THE RIGGING'S USUAL SOUNDS,  
THEN SUDDEN MOVEMENT, BLOWS AND SNARLING CRIES  
AND THEY HAD FALLEN ON US WITH MACHETE  
AND MARLIN SPIKE. IT WAS AS THOUGH THE VERY  
AIR, THE NIGHT ITSELF WERE STRIKING US.  
EXHAUSTED BY THE RIGORS OF THE STORM,  
WE WERE NO MATCH FOR THEM. OUR MEN WENT DOWN  
BEFORE THE MURDEROUS AFRICANS. OUR LOYAL  
CELESTINO RAN FROM BELOW WITH GUN  
AND LANTERN AND I SAW, BEFORE THE CANE-  
KNIFE'S WOUNDING FLASH, CINQUEZ,  
THAT SURLY BRUTE WHO CALLS HIMSELF A PRINCE,  
DIRECTING, URGING ON THE GHASTLY WORK.  
HE HACKED THE POOR MULATTO DOWN, AND THEN  
HE TURNED ON ME. THE DECKS WERE SLIPPERY  
WHEN DAYLIGHT FINALLY CAME. IT SICKENS ME  
TO THINK OF WHAT I SAW, OF HOW THESE APES  
THREW OVERBOARD THE BUTCHERED BODIES OF  
OUR MEN, TRUE CHRISTIANS ALL, LIKE SO MUCH JETSAM.  
ENOUGH, ENOUGH. THE REST IS QUICKLY TOLD:  
CINQUEZ WAS FORCED TO SPARE THE TWO OF US  
YOU SEE TO STEER THE SHIP TO AFRICA,  
AND WE LIKE PHANTOMS DOOMED TO ROVE THE SEA  
VOYAGED EAST BY DAY AND WEST BY NIGHT,  
DECEIVING THEM, HOPING FOR RESCUE,  
PRISONERS ON OUR OWN VESSEL, TILL  
AT LENGTH WE DRIFTED TO THE SHORES OF THIS

*inferred regarding Christ's famous "Transfiguration," and also on Cinqué's savior-like status.*

*But where the Christ of the New Testament recalls Isaiah's "suffering servant," Cinqué could more readily be compared to the "warrior messiah" some 2<sup>nd</sup> Cent. Jews saw in the revolutionary Bar Kokhba.*

*The messianic figure of Cinqué, coupled with the triumphant closing lines of "Middle Passage," which end in the formerly ironic refrain "Voyage through death / to life upon these shores", oppose the narratives to be found throughout sections I and II, and in fact, also do much to counter Hayden's pervasive irony.*

*What materializes, now, from this angle, is the possibility that Hayden has all along been waiting to undermine his own ironic strategies. Although, perhaps "undermine" is the wrong word.*

*More appropriately, I think, is that he transcends his own ironies, an idea which may be supported by Hayden's unnecessarily acknowledging that the names of the slave-ships in the first section are "ironical... / like jests of kindness on a murderer's mouth".*

*What otherwise might have seemed a redundant call-to-attention, is actually the acknowledgment of a discarded tool, one that will be replaced with two more radiant redundancies: the Christ-figure of Cinqué and the refrain of "Voyage through death..." both of which lose their vestiges of irony in the third section.*



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YOUR LAND, AMERICA, WHERE WE WERE FREED  
FROM OUR UNSPEAKABLE MISERY. NOW WE  
DEMAND, GOOD SIR, THE EXTRADITION OF  
CINQUEZ AND HIS ACCOMPLICES TO LA  
HAVANA. AND IT DISTRESSES US TO KNOW  
THERE ARE SO MANY HERE WHO SEEM INCLINED  
TO JUSTIFY THE MUTINY OF THESE BLACKS.  
WE FIND IT PARADOXICAL INDEED  
THAT YOU WHOSE WEALTH, WHOSE TREE OF LIBERTY  
ARE ROOTED IN THE LABOR OF YOUR SLAVES  
SHOULD SUFFER THE AUGUST JOHN QUINCY ADAMS  
TO SPEAK WITH SO MUCH PASSION OF THE RIGHT  
OF CHATTEL SLAVES TO KILL THEIR LAWFUL MASTERS  
AND WITH HIS ROMAN RHETORIC WEAVE A HERO'S  
GARLAND FOR CINQUEZ. I TELL YOU THAT  
WE ARE DETERMINED TO RETURN TO CUBA  
WITH OUR SLAVES AND THERE SEE JUSTICE DONE. CINQUEZ-  
OR LET US SAY THE PRINCE – CINQUEZ SHALL DIE.

THE DEEP IMMORTAL HUMAN WISH,  
THE TIMELESS WILL:

CINQUEZ ITS DEATHLESS PRIMAVERAL IMAGE,  
LIFE THAT TRANSFIGURES MANY LIVES.

VOYAGE THROUGH DEATH  
TO LIFE UPON THESE SHORES.

*Of course, the irony of Cinqué's revolt being brought forth by one of the prosecuting owners of the slave-ship presents its own difficulties to be navigated. But whether this is Hayden's mistake or crowning twist may, in the end, prove dangerously ambiguous.*

**Summary:** "Middle Passage" is epic in theme, retains historical perspectives and transcends them by portraying Cinquez in symbolic terms of epic scope. Cinquez's desire and struggle for freedom become the "deep immortal human wish, / the timeless will." Ultimately, then, "Middle Passage" creates a hero who represents his race in a quest for personal liberty, something in which all men have a real shared interest. Hayden's hero remains central to the entire narrative because Cinquez is the symbolic personification of the primary theme of the poem. Hayden makes the hero appear larger than life because his "life transfigures many lives." Cinquez's rebellion against enslavement thus stands for the physical and spiritual struggle for freedom by all blacks then and since.

**Character list:** Cinquez the hero; slave traders; female captives; male captives; and sailors.

**Glossary Terms:** Effluvium; Amistad; Middle Passage; Slave Trade; Justice; Gambia; Rio Pongo; Calabar;

**Major Themes:** •Unmasking The Truth •Fighting Against All Odds

**Quotes & Analysis:** Have students work collaboratively in groups, research the poem and prepare analysis of specific quotes from the poem.

**Essay Question:** Topical/ Open Forum

**Internet Connection Activity:** Have students work independently to gather data and images from the internet about the poem.

**Formative Assessment:** Power Point Presentation; Graphic Organizers; Play Wright; Theatrical Presentation; Create an original story based upon major theme



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## **RUNAGATE, RUNAGATE,**

**ROBERT HAYDEN**

“Runagate Runagate” from *Collected Poems*. Copyright © 1962, 1966 by Robert Hayden.

[http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g\\_l/hayden/runagate.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/hayden/runagate.htm)

### POEM

I

RUNS FALLS RISES STUMBLES ON FROM DARKNESS INTO DARKNESS  
AND THE DARKNESS THICKETED WITH SHAPES OF TERROR  
AND THE HUNTERS PURSUING AND THE HOUNDS PURSUING  
AND THE NIGHT COLD AND THE NIGHT LONG AND THE RIVER  
TO CROSS AND THE JACK-MUH-LANTERNS BECKONING BECKONING  
AND BLACKNESS AHEAD AND WHEN SHALL I REACH THAT  
SOMEWHERE  
MORNING AND KEEP ON GOING AND NEVER TURN BACK AND KEEP  
ON GOING

RUNGATE  
RUNGATE  
RUNGATE

MANY THOUSANDS RISE AND GO  
MANY THOUSANDS CROSSING OVER

O MYTHIC NORTH  
O STAR-SHAPED YOUNDER BIBLE CITY

SOME GO WEeping AND SOME REJOICING  
SOME IN COFFINS AND SOME IN CARRIAGES  
SOME IN SILKS AND SOME IN SHACKLES

RISE AND GO OR FARE YOU WELL

NO MORE AUCTION BLOCK FOR ME  
NO MORE DRIVER'S LASH FOR ME

### COMMENTARY

*Rhythmically, the poem captures the mood of frantic flight of a 'runagate' or a renegade or escaped slave.*

*Another good example of his organic use of metrics is in the abundant stresses and onomatopoeic pace of the lines in 'Runagate Runagate'.*

*Like the rhythm of the title, the meters in the poem suggest the frenetic pace of the running slaves and the steady, rumbling movement of a train, appropriate to the motif of the Underground Railroad.*





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IF YOU SEE MY POMPEY, 30 YRS OF AGE,  
NEW BREECHES, PLAIN STOCKINGS, NEGRO SHOES;  
IF YOU SEE MY ANNA, LIKELY YOUNG MULATTO  
BRANDED E ON THE RIGHT CHEEK, R ON THE LEFT,  
CATCH THEM IF YOU CAN AND NOTIFY SUBSCRIBER.  
CATCH THEM IF YOU CAN, BUT IT WON'T BE EASY.

THEY'LL DART UNDERGROUND WHEN YOU TRY TO CATCH THEM,  
PLUNGE INTO QUICKSAND, WHIRLPOOLS, MAZES,  
TURN INTO SCORPIONS WHEN YOU TRY TO CATCH THEM.

AND BEFORE I'LL BE A SLAVE  
I'LL BE BURIED IN MY GRAVE

NORTH STAR AND BONANZA GOLD  
I'M BOND FOR THE FREEDOM, FREEDOM-BOUND  
AND OH SUSYANNA DON'T YOU CRY FOR ME

RUNGATE  
RUNGATE  
RUNGATE

II

RISES FORM THEIR ANGUISH AND THEIR POWER,  
HARRIET TUBMAN,  
WOMAN OF EARTH, WHIPSCARRED,  
A SUMMONING, A SHINING

MEAN TO BE FREE

AND THIS WAS THE WAY OF IT, BRETHERN BRETHERN,  
WAY WE JOURNEYED FROM CAN'T TO CAN.  
MOON SO BRIGHT AND NO PLACE TO HIDE,  
THE CRY UP AND THE PATEROLLERS RIDING,  
HOUND DOGS BELLING IN BLADED AIR.  
AND FEAR STARTS A-MURBLING, NEVER MAKE IT,  
WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT. HUST THAT NOW,  
AND SHE'S TURNED UPON US, LEVELLED PISTOL  
GLINTING IN THE MOONLIGHT:  
DEAD FOLKS CAN'T JAYBIRD-TALK, SHE SAYS;  
YOU KEEP ON GOING NOW OR DIE, SHE SAYS.

*Obviously playing off the whole symbolic implications of this period in history as a time of darkness, Hayden uses the journey northward (upward on a map) as a figural expression of incipient spiritual ascent.*

*Just as the speaker has, after his descent, journeyed through the dark to discover the 'hidden ones' and his own means for escape and enlightenment, so this poem uses the physical journey to symbolize that spiritual pilgrimage.*

*But the journey is not an easy one; like the diver or the persona at Veracruz, the escapees are tempted to give up, until they are prodded into action by the indomitable heroine Harriet Tubman.*



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WANTED HARRIET TUBMAN ALIAS THE GENERAL  
ALIAS MOSES STEALER OF SLAVES

IN LEAGUE WITH GARRISON, ALCOTT, EMERSON,  
GARRET, DOUGLASS, THOREAU, JOHN BROWN

ARMED AND KNOW TO BE DANGEROUS

WANTED REWARD DEAD OR ALIVE

TELL ME, EZEKIEL, OH TELL ME DO YOU SEE  
MAILED JEHOVAH COMING TO DELIVER ME?

HOOT-OWL CALLING IN THE GHOSTED AIR,  
FIVE TIMES CALLING TO THE HANTS IN THE AIR.  
SHADOW OF A FACE IN THE SCARY LEAVES,  
SHADOW OF A VOICE IN THE TALKING LEAVES:

COME RIDE-A MY TRAIN

OH THAT TRAIN, GHOST-STORY TRAIN  
THROUGH SWAMP AND SAVANNA MOVERING MOVERING,  
OVER TRESTLES OF DEW, THROUGH CAVES OF THE WISH,  
MIDNIGHT SPECIAL ON A SABRE TRACK MOVERING MOVERING,  
FIRST STOP MERCY AND THE LAST HALLELUJAH.

COME RIDE-A MY TRAIN  
MEAN MEAN MEAN TO BE FREE.

*As in the final poem 'Frederick Douglass', the journey here is at midpoint and true freedom is a vision of the future, but these heroic figures, especially in the context of the Bahá'í perspective of history, substantiate that vision and flesh out the dream: 'Mean mean mean to be free'.*

*This piece is filled with especially keen heights of dramatic tension that bring alive the sense of dangerous enterprise and desperate, breathless, and uneven flight that the runaway slaves must have experienced.*

**Summary:** "Runagate Runagate" portrays the Underground Railroad, which in the middle 1800s aided slaves to escape north to freedom via a secret network. Led by Harriet Tubman and traveling mostly at night, the slaves would rely on navigation by stars, such as the 'drinking gourd' (the Big Dipper constellation which incorporates the North Star). Throughout rhythmic pulse of this piece, changes in cadence, the techniques of fragmentation that are used so effectively in --lines from hymns, spirituals, antislavery songs, wanted posters, voices of the slaves and of Harriet Tubman--and typographical spacing helps carry the sense of the passages.

**Character list:** Escaped Slaves; Slave Masters; Harriet Tubman; Garrison; Alcott; Emerson; Douglass; Garrett; Thoreau; John Brown; Ezekiel; and Jehovah

**Glossary Terms:** Runagate; Beckoning; Mythic North; Bible City; Auction Block; Breeches; Anguish

**Major Themes:** •Tunnel Vision •Defying Fate

**Quotes & Analysis:** Have students work collaboratively in groups, research the poem and prepare analysis of specific quotes from the poem.

**Essay Question:** Topical/ Open Forum

**Internet Connection:** Have students work independently to gather data and images from the internet about the poem.



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**Formative Assessment:** Power Point Presentation; Graphic Organizers; Play Wright; Theatrical Presentation; Create an original story based upon major theme.

## **BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME**

### **RICAHARD WRIGHT**

“Between The World & Me” – Published in the Partisan Review between 1934 & 1941

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/51842401/Analytical-essay-Between-the-World-and-Me>

#### **POEM**

AND ONE MORNING WHILE IN THE WOODS I STUMBLED SUDDENLY  
UPON THE THING  
STUMBLED UPON IT IN A GRASSY CLEARING GUARDED BY SCALY  
OAKS AND ELMS.  
AND THE SOOTY DETAILS OF THE SCENE ROSE, THRUSTING  
THEMSELVES BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME....

THERE WAS A DESIGN OF WHITE BONES SLUMBERING FORGOTTENLY  
UPON A CUSHION OF ASHES.  
THERE WAS A CHARRED STUMP OF A SAPLING POINTING A BLUNT  
FINGER ACCUSINGLY AT THE SKY  
THERE WERE TORN TREE LIMBS, TINY VEINS OF BURNT LEAVES, AND  
A SCORCHED COIL OF GREASY HEMP;  
A VACANT SHOE, AN EMPTY TIE, A RIPPED SHIRT, A LONELY HAT,  
AND A PAIR OF TROUSERS STIFF WITH BLACK BLOOD.  
AND UPN THE TRAMPLED GRASS WERE BUTTONS, DEAD MATCHES,  
BUTT-ENDS OF CIGARS AND CIGARETTES, PEANUT SHELLS, A  
DRAINED GIN-FLASK, AND WHORE'S LIPSTICK;  
SCATTERED TRACES OF TAR, RESTLESS ARRAYS OF FEATHERS, AND  
THE LINGERING SMELL OF GASOLINE.  
AND THROUGH THE MORNING AIR THE SUN POURED YELLOW  
SURPRISE  
INTO THE EYE SOCKETS OF A STONY SKULL....  
AND WHILE I STOOD MY MIND WAS FROZEN WITH A COLD PITY FOR  
THE LIFE THAT WAS GONE.  
THE GROUND GRIPPED MY FEET AND MY HEART WAS CIRCLED BY ICY  
WALLS OF FEAR –  
THE SUN DIED IN THE SKY; A NIGHT WIND MUTTERED IN THE GRASS

#### **COMMENTARY**

*In this piece the use of extraordinary realism is utilized to create images to travel through the events of the poem with great awareness.*

*Present are three literary elements that carry the tone of indignation throughout the poem, they are: personification, vivid imagery, and symbolism.*

*Wright often uses personification to give the poem life and give the speaker in the story the ability to amplify his emotions of surprise, anger, and fear. In the beginning parts of this composition, the speaker describes the scene as guarded by scaly oaks and elms' as to say that nature guarded and preserved the scene.*

*Next as the speaker moves on in his story and horrifically shifts from the observer to the victim he portrays the dramatic changes in his surroundings.*



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AND FUMBLING THE LEAVES IN THE TREES; THE WOODS  
POURED FORTH THE HUNGRY YELPING OF HOUNDS; THE  
DARKNESS SCREAMED WITH THIRSTY VOICES; AND THE  
WITNESSES ROSE AND LIVED:  
THE DRY BONES STIRRED, RATTLED, LIFTED, MELTING THEMSELVES  
INTO MY BONES.  
THE GREY ASHES FORMED FLESH FIRM AND BLACK, ENTERING INTO  
MY FLESH.  
THE GIN-FLASK PASSED FROM MOUTH TO MOUTH; CIGARS AND  
CIGARETTES GLOWED, THE WHORE SMEARED THE LIPSTICK  
RED UPON HER LIPS,  
AND A THOUSAND FACES SWIRLED AROUND ME, CLAMORING THAT  
MY LIFE BE BURNED....  
AND THEN THEY HAD ME, STRIPPED ME, BATTERING MY TEETH INTO  
MY THROAT TILL I SWALLOWED MY OWN BLOOD.  
MY VOICE WAS DROWNED IN THE ROAR OR THEIR VOICES, AND MY  
BLACK WET BODY SLIPPED AND ROLLED IN THEIR HANDS AS  
THEY BOUND ME TO THE SAPLING.  
AND MY SKIN CLUNG TO THE BUBBLING HOT TAR, FALLING FROM ME  
IN LIMP PATCHES.  
AND THE DOWN AND QUILLS OF THE WHITE FEATHERS SANK INTO MY  
RAW FLESH, AND I MOANED IN MY AGONY.  
THEN MY BLOOD WAS COOLED MERCIFULLY, COOLED BY A BAPTISM  
OF GASOLINE.  
AND IN A BLAZE OF RED I LEAPED TO THE SKY AS PAIN ROSE LIKE  
WATER, BOILING MY LIMBS.  
PANTING, BEGGING I CLUTCHED CHILDLIKE, CLUTCHED TO THE HOT  
SIDES OF DEATH.  
NOW I AM DRY BONES AND MY FACE A STONY SKULL STARING IN  
YELLOW SURPRISE AT THE SUN....

*He says: the ground gripped my feet; ... the sun died in the sky; a night wind muttered in the grass; « the darkness screamed with thirsty voices; and the witnesses rose and lived. '*

*Throughout this piece the speaker does a great job of giving the woods life and creating an eerie feeling, for example when in the beginning the speaker mentions that the woods was guarded at the scene.*

*At that point he moves towards a discovery of white slumbering bones giving them human abilities of sleeping, which symbolize the eternal sleep of death. He uses this description early in the poem to say that someone has died in that very spot and that this was their final place on earth.*

**Summary:** This poem tells of a black man who discovers a crime scene as a belated witness then learns of the social injustice, and man's inhumanity to man that took place. He stumbles upon the scene in the woods and shifts from the detached observer to vicarious suffering, and in the end deals with the loss of innocence and ironic enlightenment brought to him by discovering the gruesome crime scene.

**Character list:** Eye Witness; 1 female; 6 males

**Glossary Terms:** Yellow Surprise; Slumbering; Sapling; Scorched; Hemp; Baptism

**Major Themes:** •A Horrifying Grave Site •Vivid Imaginations

**Quotes & Analysis:** Have students work collaboratively in groups, research the poem and prepare analysis of specific quotes from the poem.

**Essay Questions:** Topical/ Open Forum

**Internet Connection:** Have students work independently to gather data and images from the internet about the poem.

**Formative Assessment:** Power Point Presentation; Graphic Organizers; Play Wright; Theatrical Presentation; Create an original story based upon major theme.



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## AFRICA LANGSTON HUGHES

Africa was published in a work called “The Poetry of Jazz,” after 1938.

<http://www.nathanielturner.com/langstonhughesandafrika.htm>

### POEM

SLEEPY GIANT,  
YOU’VE BEEN RESTING AWHILE.

NOW, I SEE THE THUNDER  
AND THE LIGHTNING  
IN YOUR SMILE.

NOW I SEE  
THE STORM CLOUDS  
IN YOUR WAKING EYES:  
THE THUNDER,  
THE WONDER,  
AND THE YOUNG SURPRISE.

YOUR EVERY STEP REVEALS  
THE NEW STRIDE  
IN YOUR THIGHS.

### COMMENTARY

*Africa had become another one of the world’s places that Hughes enjoyed visiting and writing about. From his experiences in traveling to and from Africa he wrote this poem.*

*This poem despite its age, does what so many good poems do, it speaks to its reader where that reader is found. The use of symbolism and personification really draws you in and overwhelms you with infinite joy.*

*It takes a poet of extreme vision to simultaneously be timely in one’s own day and transcendent 47 years after the your death...*

**Summary:** Africa is a poem published in a work called the “Poetry of Jazz” – a sequence of reading that he performs for large audiences, reciting to the accompaniment of beating drums. Before he developed this piece his notions about Africa remained mostly locked away among his old poems and old thoughts and he did not bring them out and dust them off until the awakening of the “New Negro” and newly found world interest in Africa.

**Character list:** A Few Dancing pieces of land (continent of Africa); 2 Dancing Clouds; 2 Dancing Eyes; 1 Thundering Bolt; 1 Sun

**Glossary Terms:** Africa; Sleepy Giant; Storm Clouds; Young Surprise; Reveals; Stride

**Major Themes:** •The Reawakening of the Sleeping Giant •Walking in Greatness

**Quotes & Analysis:** Have students work collaboratively in groups, research the poem and prepare analysis of specific quotes from the poem.

**Essay Questions:** Topical/ Open Forum

**Internet Connection:** Have students work independently to gather data and images form the internet about the poem.



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**Formative Assessment:** Power Point Presentation; Graphic Organizers; Play Wright; Theatrical Presentation; Create an original story based upon major theme.

## **WE HAVE BEEN BELIEVERS**

**MARGARET WALKER**

“We Have Been Believers” presented in her first collection of poems published in 1942

[http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s\\_z/walker/bio.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s_z/walker/bio.htm)

### **POEM**

WE HAVE BEEN BELIEVERS, BELIEVING IN THE BLACK GODS OF AN OLD LAND.  
BELIEVING IN THE SECRETS OF THE SEERS AND THE MAGIC OF THE CHARMERS AND THE POWER OF THE DEVIL'S EVIL ONES.  
AND IN THE WHITE GODS OF A NEW LAND, WE HAVE BEEN BELIEVERS,  
BELIEVING IN THE MERCY OF OUR MASTERS AND THE BEAUTY OF OUR BROTHERS,  
BELIEVING IN THE CONJURE OF THE HUMBLE AND THE FAITHFUL AND THE PURE.  
NEITHER THE SLAVER'S WHIP, NOR THE LYNCHER'S ROPE NOR THE BAYONET COULD KILL OUR BLACK BELIEF.  
IN OUR HUNGER, WE BEHELD THE WELCOME TABLE AND IN OUR NAKEDNESS THE GLORY OF A LONG WHITE ROBE.  
WE HAVE BEEN BELIEVERS INT EH NEW JERUSALEM.  
WE HAVE BEEN BELIEVERS FEEDING GREEDY GRINNING GODS, LIKE A MOLOCH, DEMANDING OUR SONS AND OUR DAUGHTERS, OUR STRENGTH AND OUR WILLS, AND OUR SPIRITS OF PAIN.  
WE HAVE BEEN BELIEVERS, SILENT AND STOLID AND STUBBORN AND STRONG.  
WE HAVE BEEN BELIEVERS, YIELDING SUBSTANCE FOR THE WORLD.  
WITH OUR HANDS HAVE WE FED A PEOPLE AND OUT OF OUR STRENGTH HAVE THEY WRUNG THE NECESSITIES OF A NATION. OUR SONG HAS FILLED THE TWILIGHT AND OUR HOPE HAS HEARLDED THE DAWN.  
NOW, WE STAND READY FOR THE TOUCH OF ONE FIERY IRON, FOR THE CLEANSING BREATH OF MANY MOLTEN TRUTHS, THAT THE EYES OF THE BLIND MAY SEE AND THE EARS OF THE DEAF MAY HEAR AND

### **COMMENTARY**

*"We Have Been Believers," another poem from Walker's first collection, follows the free verse form of the title poem, as do many pieces in the book.*

*It is a poem about the sustaining power of African American belief, whether it be in "the black gods of an old / land," "the white gods of a new land," or the "conjure of the humble / and the faithful and the pure."*

*Walker recognizes that such faith fosters the race's survival.*

*She says, "Neither the slavers' whip nor the lynchers' rope nor the / bayonet could kill our black belief."*

*Yet she also criticizes how belief in "greedy grinning gods" has taxed "our wills" and encouraged "our spirits of pain."*

*Her final call, however, is not a plea for tolerance and forgiveness; rather it is an exhortation for protest.*





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THE TONGUES OF THE PEOPLE MAY BE FILLED WITH LIVING FIRE.  
WHERE ARE OUR GODS THAT THEY LEAVE US ASLEEP.  
SURELY THE PRIESTS, AND THE PREACHERS, AND THE POWERS WILL  
HEAR.  
SURELY, NOW, THAT OUR HANDS ARE EMPTY AND OUR HEARTS TOO  
FULL TO PRAY, THEY WILL UNDERSTAND.  
SURELY, THE SIRS OF THE PEOPLE WILL SEND US A SIGN.  
WE HAVE BEEN BELIEVERS,  
BELIEVING IN OUR BURDENS AND OUR DEMIGODS TOO LONG.  
NOW, THE NEEDY NO LONGER WEEP AND PRAY,  
THE LONG-SUFFERING ARISE,  
AND OUR FISTS BLEED AGAINST THE BARS WITH A STRANGE  
INSISTENCY.

*She admits a need for answers and "molten truths" but also enjoins her people to seize the power needed for spiritual, emotional, and political transformation.*

**Summary:** *"We / have been believers, silent and stolid and stubborn and strong." The poems invest readers with a fresh vision of spiritual independence and a challenge to refashion a world in their own image, the image of the true egalitarian whose faith and values were forged in the crucible of oppression.*

**Character List:** God Almighty; church folk; the devil; slaver drivers; and lynchers

**Glossary Terms:** Bayonet; Lynch; Yielding; Insistency; and Jerusalem

**Major Themes:** · Good vs. Evil · Spiritual Transformation

**Quotes & Analysis:** Have students work collaboratively in groups, research the poem and prepare analysis of specific quotes from the poem.

**Essay Questions:** Topical/ Open Forum.

**Internet Connection:** Have students work independently to gather data and images from the internet about the poem.

**Formative Assessment:** Power Point Presentation; Graphic Organizers; Play Wright; Theatrical Presentation; Create an original story based upon major theme.

## STRONG MEN

STERLING BROWN

"Strong Men" presented in his first book of poems *Southern Road*; published in 1932

<http://thedifficultformandcontent.wordpress.com/2011/05/01/strong-men/>

### POEM

THEY DRAGGED YOU FROM HOMELAND,  
THEY CHAINED YOU IN COFFLES,  
THEY HUDDLED YOU SPOON-FASHION IN FILTHY HATCHES,

### COMMENTARY

*Just from reading the descriptions of "they" we can assume that they are the white people back then who had slaves to do all the dirty work. The speaker who is "us" is*



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THEY SOLD YOU TO GIVE A FEW GENTLEMEN EASE.

THEY BROKE YOU IN LIKE OXEN,  
THEY SCOURGED YOU,  
THEY BRANDED YOU,  
THEY MADE YOUR WOMEN BREEDERS,  
THEY SWELLED YOUR NUMBERS WITH BASTARDS...  
THEY TAUGHT YOU THE RELIGION THEY DISGRACED.

YOU SANG:  
KEEP A-INCHING' ALONG  
LAK A PO' INCH WORM.  
YOU SANG:  
BYE AND BYE  
I'M GONNA LAY DOWN DIS HEABY LOAD...  
YOU SANG:  
WALK TOGEDDER, CHILLEN,  
DONTCHA GIT WEARY...  
THE STRONG MEN KEEP A-COMIN' ON  
THE STRONG MEN GIT STRONGER.

THEY POINTWITH PRIDE TO THE ROADS YOU BUILT FOR THEM.  
THEY RIDE IN COMFORT OVER THE RAILS YOU LAID FOR THEM.  
THEY PUT HAMMERS IN YOUR HANDS  
AND SAID – DRIVE SO MUCH BEFORE SUNDOWN.

YOU SANG:  
AIN'T NO HAMMAH  
IN DIS LAN,  
STRIKES LAK MINE, BEBBY,  
STRIKES LAK MINE.

THEY COOPED YOU IN THEIR KITCHES,,  
THEY PENNED YOU IN THEIR FACTORIES,  
THEY GAVE YOU THE JOBS THAT THEY WERE TOO GOOD FOR,  
THEY TRIED TO GUARANTEE HAPPINESS TO THEMSELVES  
BY SHUNTING DIRT AND MISERY TO YOU.

YOU SANG:  
ME AN' MUH BABY GONNA SHINE, SHINE  
ME AN' MUH BABY GONNA SHINE.  
THE STRONG MEN KEEP A-COMING, ON  
THE STRONG MEN GIT STRONGER...

*the slaves that were put through all the trouble.*

*In the beginning of the poem there is a two line quote that is used as a reference to the main point of the poem.*

*Throughout this poem this quote and a quote that's very similar to it will be repeatedly used to describe how all this torment really only makes "us" stronger and how all the work was done by "us" really shows who the stronger man is.*

*"The young men keep coming on"*

*"The strong men keep coming on"*

*This poem uses a lot of repetition of the words "they" and "you". In lines one through four "they" is constantly used to really emphasize the people and who they are. Reading just these ten lines the reader can understand that "they" are cruel people and have done a lot of misdemeanors against the "us". "They" start out by kidnapping chaining and selling each one of "us".*

*Lines 1-4 They dragged you from homeland  
They chained you in coffles,  
They huddled you spoon-fashion in filthy hatches,  
They sold you to give a few gentlemen ease.*

*Once in America other horrible acts are listed in the second stanza. In line ten it states that the white men are hypocritical and they do not even follow the religion like they really should.*

*Starting at line eleven the poem describes what "they" would say. The accent is really emphasized to show that it was the way white men back then spoke. It also explains how boastful they are even when they were not the ones out in the fields doing the hard work.*

*Lines 26-30  
You sang:*



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THEY BOUGHT OFF SOME OF YOUR LEADERS  
YOU STUMBLED, AS BLIND MEN WILL...  
THEY COAXED YOU, UNWONTEDLY SOFT-VOICED...  
YOU FOLLOWED A WAY.  
THEN LAUGHED AS USUAL.

THEY HEARD THE LAUGH AND WONDERED;  
UNCOMFORTABLE;  
UNADMITTING A DEEPER TERROR...  
THE STRONG MEN KEEP A-COMIN' ON  
GITTIN STRONGER

WHAT, FROM THE SLUMS  
WHERE THEY HAVE HEMMED YOU,  
WHAT, FROM THE TINY HUTS  
THEY COULD NOT KEEP FROM YOU –  
WHAT REACHES THEM  
MAKING THEM ILL AT EASE, FEARFUL?  
TODAY THEY SHOUT PROHIBITION AT YOU  
THOU SHALT NOT THIS  
THOU SHALT NOT THAT  
RESERVED FOR WHITES ONLY  
YOU LAUGH.

ONE THING THEY CANNOT PROHIBIT –  
THE STRONG MEN...COMING ON  
THE STRONG MEN GITTIN, STRONGER.  
STRONG MEN...  
STRONGER...  
STRONGER...

*Ain't no hammah  
In dis lan',  
Strikes lak mine  
Strikes lak mine.*

*The meaning of this poem is that what all the white men are doing to the people is actually making them stronger. "They" become weaker because they do not do much and all are very hypocritical. All the degradation of "us" will not break them down. There are certain things "they" cannot take away from the slaves and that is their spirit of becoming stronger men represented in lines sixty-two through sixty-six.*

*Lines 62-66  
One thing they cannot prohibit-  
The strong men...coming on  
The strong men gittin' stronger  
Strong men.....  
Stronger....*

*Just from all the evidence the poem has given, people can assume that this is the struggle between the black and white societies. Even though this was written in 1930 there was still a lot of discrimination against blacks during this time period. The poem puts the history of the discrimination starting from slavery to the prohibition of certain rights.*

**Summary:** The poem "Strong Men" is written by Sterling Brown and appears to speak of a certain group of people throughout the poem. It does not directly state who "they" are but instead the poem expresses the actions of what "they" have done.

**Character List:** Black folk; White Folk; Congress Men

**Glossary Terms:** Prohibition; Unwontedly; Coaxed

**Major Themes:** • Us against Them • The Strong Will Survive

**Quotes & Analysis:** Have students work collaboratively in groups, research the poem and prepare analysis of specific quotes from the poem.

**Essay Questions:** Topical/ Open Forum.

**Internet Connection:** Have students work independently to gather data and images from the internet about the poem.

**Formative Assessment:** Power Point Presentation; Graphic Organizers; Play Wright; Theatrical Presentation; Create an original story based upon major theme.



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## FOR MY PEOPLE

MARGARET WALKER

“For My People” published by Yale University Press in 1942

[http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s\\_z/walker/bio.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s_z/walker/bio.htm)

### POEM

FOR MY PEOPLE EVERYWHERE SINGING THEIR SLAVE SONGS  
REPEATEDLY;  
THEIR DIRGES AND THEIR DITTIES AND THEIR BLUES AND JUBILEES,  
PRAYING THEIR PRAYERS NIGHTLY TO AN UNKNOWN GOD,  
BENDING THEIR KNEES HUMBLY TO AN UNSEEN POWER;

FOR MY PEOPLE LENDING THEIR STRENGTH TO THE YEARS,  
TO THE GONE YEARS AND THE NOW YEARS AND THE MAYBE YEARS,  
WASHING IRONING COOKING SCRUBBING SEWING MENDING,  
HOEING PLOWING DIGGING PLANTING PRUNING PATCHING  
DRAGGING ALONG NEVER GAINING NEVER REAPING  
NEVER KNOWING AND NEVER UNDERSTANDING;

FOR MY PLAYMATES IN THE CLAY AND DUST AND SAND OF ALABAMA  
BACKYARDS, PLAYING BAPTIZING AND PREACHING AND DOCTOR AND  
JAIL AND SOLDIER AND SCHOOL AND MAMA AND COOKING AND  
PLAYHOUSE AND CONCERT AND STORE AND HAIR  
AND MISS CHOOMBY AND COMPANY;

FOR THE CRAMPED BEWILDERED YEARS WE WENT TO SCHOOL TO  
LEARN TO KNOW THE REASONS WHY AND THE ANSWERS TO AND  
THE PEOPLE WHO AND THE PLACES WHERE AND THE DAYS WHEN,  
IN MEMORY OF THE BITTER HOURS WHEN WE DISCOVERED WE  
WERE BLACK AND POOR AND SMALL AND DIFFERENT AND NOBODY  
CAFRED AND NOBODY WONDERED AND NOBODY UNDERSTOOD;

FOR THE BOYS AND GIRLS WHO GREW IN SPITE OF THESE THINGS  
TO BE MAN AND WOMAN, TO LAUGH AND DANCE AND SING AND  
PLAY AND DRINK THEIR WINE AND RELIGION AND SUCCESS, TO  
MARRY THEIR PLAYMATES AND BEAR CHILDREN AND THEN DIE OF  
CONSUMPTION AND ANEMIA AND LYNCHING;

### COMMENTARY

*The opening stanzas of Walker's poem ring with a particularly lyrical note. She establishes from the beginning a pattern of overflowing gerunds and participles unpunctuated with the requisite comma, leaving the reader almost breathless.*

*This poem consists of three parts, each of which is written in a different verse form: free verse, folk narratives in the ballad tradition, and sonnets.*

*Part I is the beginning of a middle class female's bildungsroman that collapses class distinctions as the speaker aligns herself with different groups of common Blacks and discovers her vocation as a political poet. As she imaginatively interacts with these people, they provide the impetus for her development, and as her vision matures, they become more powerful. Thus, the speaker and the groups reciprocate and augment each other's growth, a dynamic illustrated by the following sequence of poems.*

*In Part II, Walker also ensures that the Black community does not replicate a socio-economic hierarchy that privileges status or wealth by interrupting her speaker's journey with a series of folk narratives that give voice to less educated Blacks. These tales are related by speakers whose speech patterns range from virtually replicating standard English to a vernacular that may be described as subject-verb disagreement, dropping auxiliary verbs, and using double subjects and folk pronunciation.*



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FOR MY PEOPLE THRONGING 47<sup>TH</sup> STREET IN CHICAGO AND  
LENOX AVENUE IN NEW YORK AND RAMPART STREET IN NEW  
ORLEANS, LOST DISINHERITED DISPOSSESSED AND HAPPY PEOPLE  
FILLING THE CABARETS AND TAVERNS AND OTHER PEOPLE'S  
POCKETS  
NEEDING BREAD AND SHOES AND MILK AND LAND AND MONEY  
AND SOMETHING – SOMETHING ALL OUR OWN;

FOR MY PEOPLE WALKING BLINDLY SPREADING JOY, LOSING TIME  
BEING LAZY, SLEEPING WHEN HUNGRY, SHOUTING WHEN BURDENED,  
DRINKING WHEN HOPELESS, TIED AND SHACKLED AND  
TANGLED AMONG OURSELVES BY THE UNSEEN CREATURES WHO  
TOWER OVER US OMNISCIENTLY AND LAUGH;

FOR MY PEOPLE BLUNDERING AND GROPING AND FLOUNDERING IN  
THE DARK OF CHURCHES AND SCHOOLS AND CLUBS AND SOCIETIES,  
ASSOCIATIONS AND COUNCILS, AND COMMITTEES AND  
CONVENTIONS,  
DISTRESSED AND DISTURBED AND DECEIVED AND DEVOURED BY  
MONEY-HUNGRY GLORY-CRAVING LEECHES, PREYED ON BY FACILE  
FORCE OF STATE AND FAD AND NOVELTY, BY FALSE PROPHET AND  
HOLY BELIEVER;

FOR MY PEOPLE STANDING STARING TRYING TO FASHION A BETTER  
WAY FROM CONFUSION, FROM HYPOCRISY,  
AND MISUNDERSTANDING,  
TRYING TO FASHION A WORLD THAT WILL HOLD ALL THE PEOPLE,  
ALL THE FACES, ALL THE ADAMS AND EVES AND THEIR COUNTLESS  
GENERATIONS;

LET A NEW EARTH RISE. LET ANOTHER WORLD BE BORN. LET A  
BLOODY PEACE BE WRITTEN IN THE SKY. LET A SECOND  
GENERATION FULL OF COURAGE ISSUE FORTH; LET A PEOPLE  
LOVING FREEDOM COME TO GROWTH. LET A BEAUTY FULL OF  
HEALING AND STRENGTH OF FINAL CLENCHING BE THE PULSING IN  
OUR SPIRITS AND OUR BLOOD. LET THE MARITAL SONGS BE  
WRITTEN, LET THE DIRGES DISAPPEAR. LET A RACE OF MEN NOW  
RISE AND TAKE CONTROL.

*These tales have further political repercussions because Walker encodes revolutionary actions in the behavior of people who are physically small, but who exert immense energy or strength. However, Walker emphasizes that human beings are still vulnerable because character flaws can thwart them or because they cannot completely control any situation.*

*Because violence would exact too high a price on African Americans and by extension all working class people, the middle class speaker reappears in Part III and embraces peaceful means to change the status quo. Especially in "Our Need" and "The Struggle Staggers Us," she advocates a community of people who accept each other and actualize the moral and practical virtues of her grandmothers: Courageous, honest and reflective people who devise ways that ensure a better life for others are her alternative to revolutionaries.*

*Perhaps that is the sense the author wishes to convey: a ceaseless and tiring existence that has come to wear down even the most resilient of black folk, inviting readers to feel the utter futility of "her people" who are "praying their prayers nightly to an / unknown god, bending their knees humbly to an / unseen power."*

*Likewise, we feel the ambivalence of their lives, alternately manifesting burden and exultation, as she describes them singing "their dirges and their ditties and their blues / and jubilees." Not only do we hear the songs being sung, but we also toil literally with those who are constantly "plowing digging planting pruning patching / dragging along never gaining never reaping never / knowing and never understanding*

**Summary:** *"For My People," the title poem in the author's first volume, is a timeless piece. The poem poignantly describes the joys, heartaches, and triumphs of African Americans in the United States. Written in free verse, the poem chronicles the everyday and often mundane aspects of hard labor and the simple pleasures of a dispossessed people. Yet it also makes blacks complicit in their own misery and calls for a new day, a revolution of the masses.*

**Character List:** Female/ Male Singers & Dancers; Congregation; Narrator



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**Glossary Terms:** Generations; Facile; Leeches; Blundering;

**Major Themes:** Let Us Rise

**Quotes & Analysis:** Have students work collaboratively in groups, research the poem and prepare analysis of specific quotes from the poem.

**Essay Questions:** Topical/ Open Forum/ Journal Entry

**Internet Connection:** Have students work independently to gather data and images from the internet about the poem.

**Formative Assessment:** Power Point Presentation; Graphic Organizers; Play Wright; Theatrical Presentation; Create an original story based upon major theme.

## FINAL CALL

LANGSTON HUGHES

“Final Call” presented in first book (*Weary Blues*) published in 1926

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-vintage-hughes/chapanal113.html>

### POEM

SEND FOR THE PIED PIPER AND LET HIM PIPE OUR RATS AWAY.  
 SEND FOR ROBIN HOOD TO CLINCH THE ANTI-POVERTY CAMPAIGN.  
 SEND FOR THE FAIRY QUEEN WITH A WAVE OF THE WAND  
 TO MAKE US ALL INTO PRINCES AND PRINCESSES.  
 SEND FOR KING ARTHUR TO BRING THE HOLY GRAIL.  
 SEND FOR OLD MAN MOSES TO LAY DOWN THE LAW.  
 SEND FOR JESUS TO PREACH THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.  
 SEND FOR DREYFUSS TO CRY, “J,ACCUSE!”  
 SEND FOR DEAD BLIND LEMON TO SING THE B FLAT BLUES.  
 SEND FOR ROBESPIERRE TO SCREAM, “CA IRA! CA IRA! CA IRA.”  
 SEND (GOD FORBID – HE’S NOT DEAL LONG ENOUGH)  
 FOR LUMUBA TO CRY, “FREEDOM NOW!”  
 SEND FOR LAFAYETTE AND TELL HIM, “HELP! HELP! ME!”  
 SEND FOR DENMARK VESY CRYING, “FREE!”  
 FOR CINQUE SAYING, “RUN A NEW FLAG UP THE MAST.”  
 FOR OLD JOHN BROWN WHO KNEW SAVERY COULDN’T LAST.  
 SEND FOR LENIN! (DON’T YOU DARE – HE CAN’T COME HERE!)  
 SEND FOR TROTSKY! WHAT? (DON’T CONFUSE THE ISSUE PLEASE!)  
 SEND FOR UNCLE TOM ON HIS MIGHT KNEES.  
 SEND FOR LINCOLN, SEND FOR GRANT,  
 SEND FOR FREDERICK DOUGLASS, GARRISON, BEECHER, LOWELL.

### COMMENTARY

*This poem may appear to be a list of names but the community of love and struggle that the list represents and the poem canonizes creates an extremely moving experience for the reader.*

*Hughes calls for the sun to come and create a better world for a young addict who is killing himself with the drugs that allow him to escape into a fantasy land preferable to the vile life he lives in Harlem.*

*This heartbreaking poem sympathizes with the young man who finds it easier to get dope than to get a job. His drugs allow him to close his ears to "Harlem screams" and shut his eyes to the desperation around him.*

*He has no way to understand, Hughes tells us, that a sunrise beginning in some other land will soon flood his darkness and create a new world. This sun is a sun from Africa and represents the hope of black nationalism that Hughes briefly entertained.*

*This poem is a true call for action, not only to the black community but to all men; to all*





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SEND FOR HARRIET TUBMAN! OLD SOJOURNER TRUTH!  
SEND FOR MARCUS GARVEY (WHAT?) (SUFI) (WHO?) FATHER DIVINE  
(WHERE?)  
DU BOIS (WHEN?) MALCOLM (OH!) SEND FOR STOKELY (NO?)  
THEN  
SEND FOR ADAM POWELL ON A NON-SUBPOENA DAY.  
SEND FOR THE PIED PIPER TO PIPE OUR RATS AWAY.  
(AND IF NOBODY COMES, SEND FOR ME!)

*men that are interested in a world filled with justice, humility, compassion and love; to all that are discussed with bigotry, racism, hatred and fear; to all that desire to take interest in the well fare of their neighbor and embrace all people with the intent to do good by them, to care for them, and to truly love them as one would love their own selves. Hughes was not necessarily stuck on the idea of calling on a ton of people to do something but he was interested in standing for what was right, even if he had to stand alone. He was interested in answering the call even if he was the only one willing to respond.*

**Summary:** *This poem is a cry for help from the champions of justice and freedom. Hughes calls for the Pied Piper, Robin Hood, a fairy queen, King Arthur, Moses, Jesus, Dreyfus, the blues singer Blind Lemon, Robespierre, Lumumba, Lafayette, Denmark Vesey, Cinque, John Brown, Lenin, Trotsky, Uncle Tom, Lincoln, Grant, Frederick Douglass, Garrison, Beecher, Lowell, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Marcus Garvey, Sufi, Father Divine, DuBois, Malcolm, Stokely, and Adam Powell. At the end, Hughes returns to the Pied Pieper, and asks that he be sent to pipe our rats away. He ends with a parenthetical saying that if nobody comes, he himself should be sent for.*

**Character List:** Narrator; and female/ male role for everyone listed in the poem

**Glossary Term:** Campaign; Bewildered; Non-subpoena

**Major Themes:** • A cry for help • A Fight for Justice

**Quotes & Analysis:** Have students work collaboratively in groups, research the poem and prepare analysis of specific quotes from the poem.

**Essay Questions:** Topical/ Open Forum/ Journal Entry

**Internet Connection:** Have students work independently to gather data and images form the internet about the poem.

**Formative Assessment:** Power Point Presentation; Graphic Organizers; Play Wright; Theatrical Presentation; Create an original story based upon major theme.

## LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

J. ROSAMOND JOHNSON & JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

“Lift Every Voice And Sing” was first written as a poem and entered into the U.S. Congressional Record in 1990

<https://suite.io/linda-sue-grimes/vz022h>

### POEM

LIFT EV'RY VOICE AND SING  
TILL EARTH AND HEAVEN RING,  
RING WITH THE HARMONIES OF

### COMMENTARY

*In the first stanza, the speaker is exhorting his listeners to sing, to make a glorious noise unto Heaven. The voices are to [r]ing with harmonies of liberty. The speaker demands*



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LIBERTY;  
LET OUR REJOICING RISE  
HIGH AS THE LISTENING SKIES,  
LET IT RESOUND LOUD AS THE ROLLING SEAS;

SING A SONG FULL OF THE FAITH THAT THE  
DARK PAST HAS TAUGHT US,  
SING A SONG FULL OF THE HOPE THAT THE  
PRESENT HAS BROUGHT US;  
FACING THE RISING SUN  
OF OUR NEW DAY BEGUN  
LET US MARCH ON TILL VICTORY IS WON.

STONY THE ROAD WE TROD,  
BITTER THE CHASTENING ROD  
FELT IN THE DAYS WHEN HOPES UNBORN HAD DIED.  
YET WITH A STEADY BEAT  
HAVE NOT OUR WEARY FEET  
COME TO THE PLACE FOR WHICH OUR FATHERS SIGNED,  
WE HAVE COME OVER A WAY THAT WITH TEARS HAS BEEN WATERED,  
WE HAVE COME TREADING OUR PATH THROUGH THE BLOOD OF THE  
SLAUGHTERED,  
OUT FROM THE GLOOMY PAST,  
TILL NOW WE STAND AT LAST  
WHERE THE WHITE GLEAM OF OUR BRIGHT STAR IS CAST.

GOD OF OUR WEARY YEARS,  
GOD OF OUR SILENT TEARS,  
THOU WHO HAS BROUGHT US THUS FAR ON THE WAY;  
THOU WHO HAST BY THY MIGHT  
LED US INTO THE LIGHT  
KEEP US FOREVER IN THE PATH, WE PRAY.  
LEST OUR FEET STRAY FROM THE PLACES,  
OUR GOD, WHERE WE MET THEE,  
LEST OUR HEARTS DRUNK WITH THE WINE OF THE WORLD,  
WE FORGET THEE,  
SHADOWED BENEATH THY HAND,  
MAY WE FOREVER STAND,  
TRUE TO OUR GOD, TRUE TO OUR NATIVE LAND.

**Summary:** "Lift Every Voice and Sing" was first written as a poem. Created by James Weldon Johnson, it was performed for the first time by 500 school children in celebration of President Lincoln's Birthday on February 12, 1900 in Jacksonville, FL. The poem was set to music by Johnson's brother, John Rosamond Johnson, and soon adopted by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as its official song. Today "Lift Every Voice and Sing" is one of the most cherished songs of the African American Civil Rights Movement and is often referred to as the Black National Anthem.

*that the singing be wide-spread to the sea and sky.*

*He asks that the song be filled with the faith that the dark past has taught us, and with the hope that the present has brought us. And he urges his hearers to march on till victory is won. He suggests that victory is not an end in itself, especially victory for freedom, but something that requires eternal vigilance, lest it be lost.*

*The speaker then reminds his fellow travelers that their way has not been easy; the road has been stony. Not impassible but nevertheless, not a smooth ride. This difficulty was especially noted earlier on when hope unborn had died. Even before the people could have hope, the hope seemed to have vanished. But still with weary feet and by unflagging courage, they have finally arrived at that place their forefathers had struggled hard to achieve. They have marched on undaunted over a path watered by tears, and they have trod through the sludge of the blood of the slaughtered. The past is gloomy, but now they stand [w]here the white gleam of our bright star is cast. Hope has now been brought alive by their valiant struggle.*

*The third stanza is a thanksgiving prayer to God. The speaker acknowledges that God has always been with them as they have struggled for liberty through the weary years with silent tears. He recognizes that God has brought them into the light, and he prays that they will remain on the right path. He asks God to keep their feet from straying from His mercy and guidance; he also implores the Divinity to help them not become intoxicated with the worldliness that takes their attention from God. The speaker then pleads that they may forever stand [s]hadowed beneath [Gods] hand. And he expresses his will that they remain faithful to God, and to their homeland.*



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**Character List:** Narrator; Congregation; Chorus; Female/ Male dancers

**Glossary Term:** Treading; Gloomy; Slaughtered; Cast; Harmonies

**Major Themes:** We Shall Over Come

**Quotes & Analysis:** Have students work collaboratively in groups, research the poem and prepare analysis of specific quotes from the poem.

**Essay Questions:** Topical/ Open Forum/ Journal Entry

**Internet Connection:** Have students work independently to gather data and images from the internet about the poem.

**Formative Assessment:** Power Point Presentation; Graphic Organizers; Play Wright; Theatrical Presentation; Create an original story based upon major theme.



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#### ABOUT THE POETS

- ❖ **Countee Cullen**, poet, editor, teacher, was born in New York City, May 30, 1903. He was one of the most famous writers of the Harlem Renaissance, influenced mostly by Keats and Tennyson. His volumes of poetry include *Color* (1925); *The Ballard of the Brown Girl and Copper Sun* (1927); *The Black Christ* (1929); and *The Medea and Other Poems* (1935). He joined the ancestors, January 9, 1946.
- ❖ **Robert Hayden**, poet and English professor, born in 1913 in Detroit, Michigan, held the B.A. and M.A. degrees and was the winner of many awards and grants including *The Hopwood Award* (1938); *Rosenwald Fellowship* (1947); *Ford Foundation grant* (1954); and the *Grand Prize for Poetry at the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar*, Senegal (1965). His published works of poetry include *Heart-Shape in the Dust* (1940); *Ballard of Remembrance* (1962); and *Selected Poems* (1966). He joined the ancestors February 25, 1980.
- ❖ **Richard Wright** was born in 1908 and was a writer of fiction which dealt with the social problems facing the American Negro. His first book, *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938) was followed by *Native Son* (1930); the scene of which is laid in Chicago. Both novels won Wright the *Spingarn Medal* in 1941. *Native Son* became a play and a movie. *Black Boy* (1945) is based on the early years of Wright's life. He also wrote *White Man, Listen!* (1957) and *Lawd Today*, published in 1963, after his death. Wright was born in Natchez, Mississippi and left home at 15. He had little education. He moved to Chicago at the beginning of the depression of the 1930's. After a prolific career, he joined the ancestors in 1960.
- ❖ **Margaret Walker**, poet, novelist, English professor, was born in Birmingham, Alabama, July 27 1915. She earned four degrees: B.A., M.A., Ph.D., and Doctorate of Literature and was the winner of the *Yale Award for Younger Poets* (1942); *Rosenwald Foundation Fellow* (1944); and the *Ford Foundation Fellow* (1953). Her published writings include *For My People*, poems (1942); *Jubilee*, novel (1975); *Prophets for a New Day*, poems (1970); and *October Journey*, poems (1973). Walker proclaimed "*We are still a people of spirit and soul. We are still fighting in the midst of white American racism for the overwhelming truth of the primacy of human personality and the spiritual destiny of all mankind.*"
- ❖ **Langston Hughes** was a poet, fiction writer, playwright, novelist, journalist, biographer, historian, anthologist, translator and critic. He was one of the best known and most versatile black American writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While a poet first and foremost, from his professional beginnings as part of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's until his death in the late 1960's; Hughes experimented with varying degrees of success in almost every literary genre. His poems have been translated into six languages and many were set to music. His words include the book of verse, *The Weary Blues* (1926); *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927); *The Dream Keeper* (1932); *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942); *Freedom's Plow* (1943); and the novel, *Not Without Laughter* (1930). Hughes was awarded the *Spingarn Medal* in 1960. He was elected to the *National Institute of Arts and Sciences* in 1961.
- ❖ **Sterling Brown**, born in 1901 of migrant parents from Virginia, where his father was born into slavery, was a scholar and writer who became a father figure to several generations of African-American writers. A leading voice in the black literary awakening called the *New Negro Renaissance*, Sterling Brown was a respected man of letters who worked tirelessly through his writing to elevate the history and experience of his community and to preserve the artifacts and symbols of African-American culture. He taught for over 40 years at Howard University and before his death in 1989, was named Washington, D.C.'s first poet laureate.
- ❖ **J. Rosamond and James Weldon Johnson** are best known for their collaborative effort on *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. Rosamond Johnson composed the music and James Weldon Johnson wrote the words. The latter is well known also for *God's Trombones* (1927), a collection of sermons in verse. His other books include a novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), and anthology of African American poetry, and two collections of spirituals. He served as a United States consul in Venezuela and Nicaragua. He also served for 14 years as secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He was born in Jacksonville, Florida in 1871 and joined the ancestors in 1938.



# Jah Kente International Youth Theatre: Study Guide

Redemption Ritual

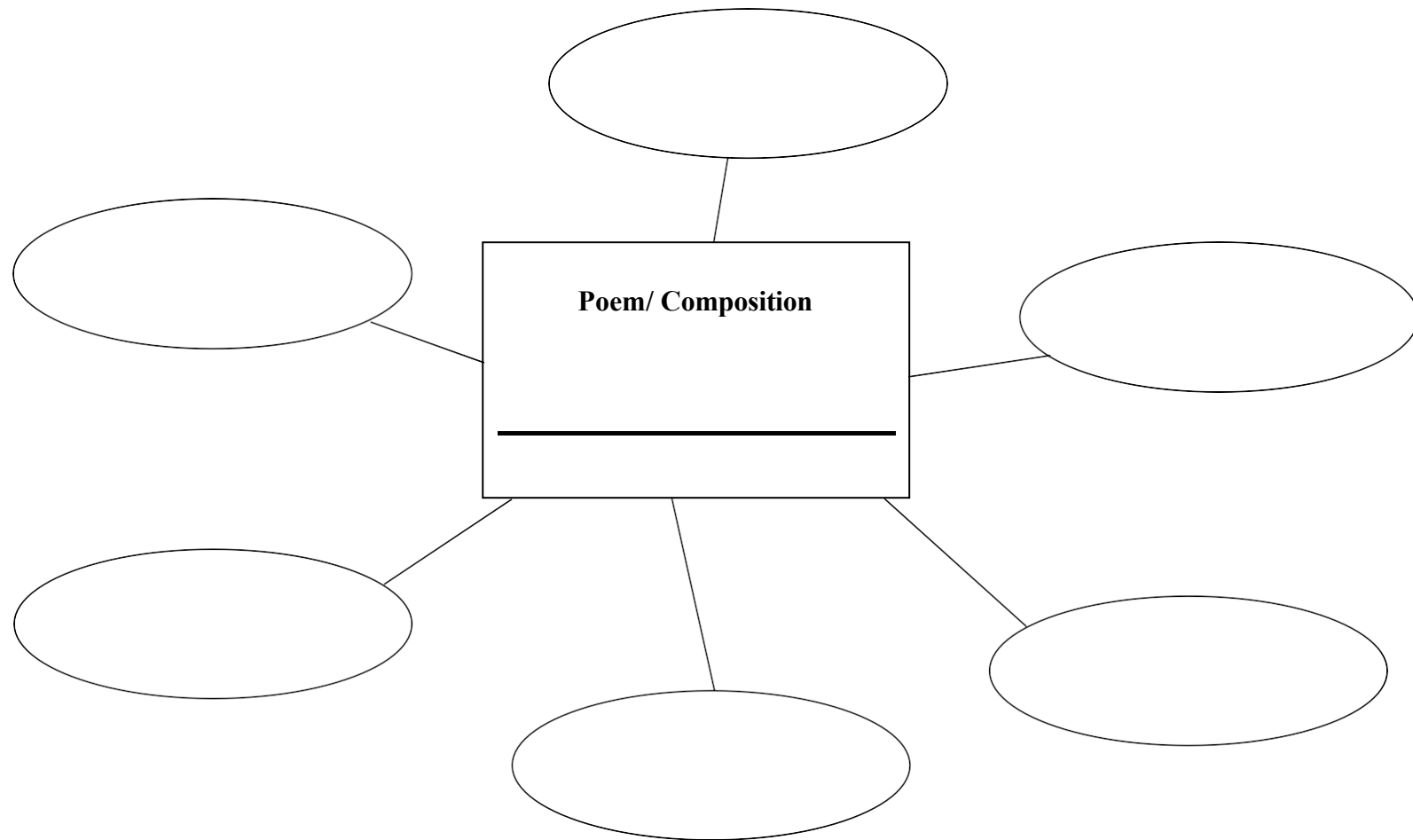
Connecting Communities through Words, Stories and Traditions in the Arts



## LESSON PLAN ACTIVITY OUTLINE

- ❖ Warm-ups (10 minutes): Use your prior knowledge and complete the concept of definition web for a selected poem/ composition.

### CONCEPT OF DEFINITION WEB





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❖ Mini-Lesson (15 min): Have students brainstorm and write an original drama based upon a selected poem. Complete the Story Construction diagram. Prepare to share.

## STORY CONSTRUCTION DIAGRAM

MAIN CHARACTERS:

TIME & SETTING:

**3. Climax**  
(MAXIMUM INTENSITY & SUSPENSE)

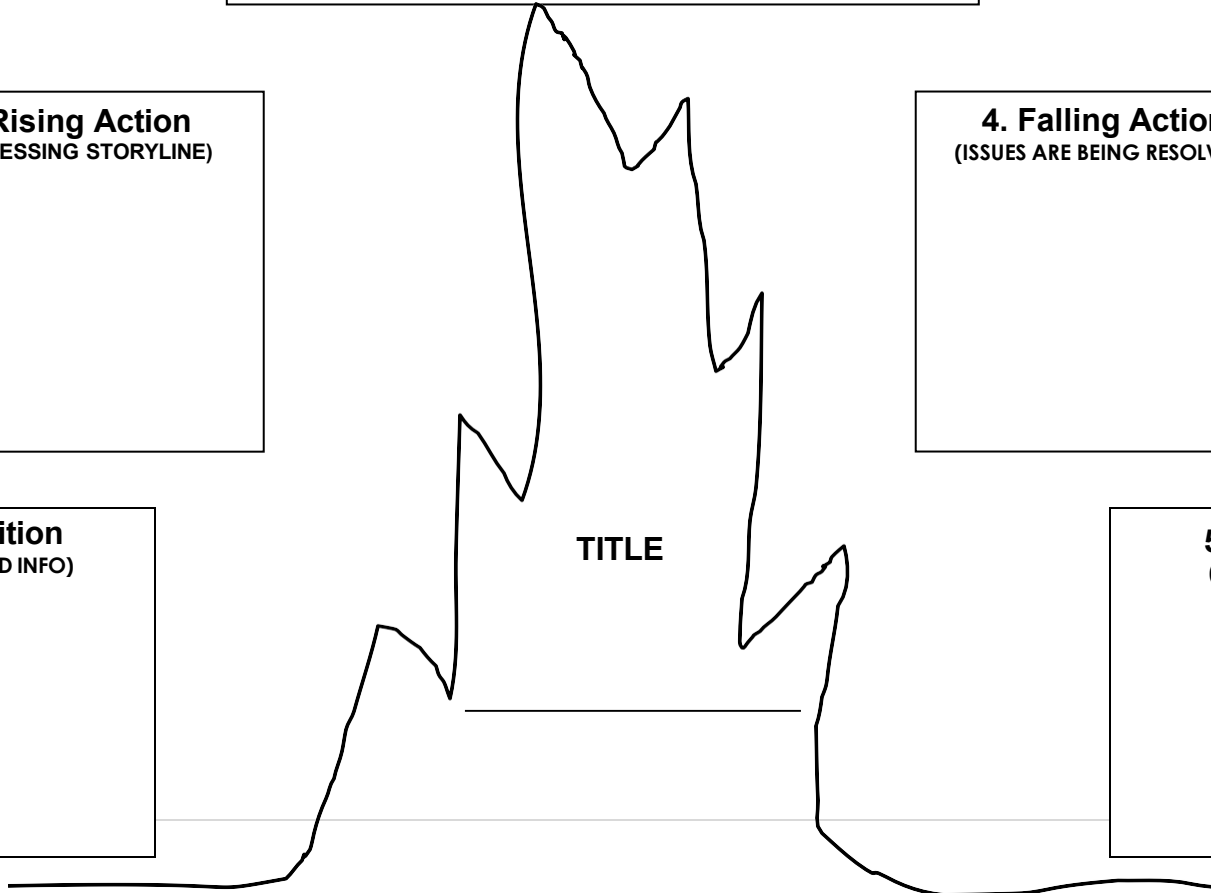
**2. Rising Action**  
(PROGRESSING STORYLINE)

**4. Falling Action**  
(ISSUES ARE BEING RESOLVED)

**1. Exposition**  
(BACKGROUND INFO)

TITLE

**5. Resolution**  
(FINAL DETERMINATION)







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## Redemption Ritual

### Connecting Communities through Words, Stories and Traditions in the Arts



❖ **Group Lesson (15 min):** Students work in groups and answer the following assessment questions. Prepare to share.

- What makes a story?
- What literary devices can we use to create an original story?
- How does the school setting affect the plot?
- What is the morale lesson of the story?

#### **Practice Skill: Summarization of the moral lesson**

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**TOPIC:**

**IMPORTANT DETAILS**

**SUMMARY**



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❖ Evaluation (Culminating Activity) – Skit/ Playwriting Session: Analyze a selected composition. Write an original one. Critique others and prepare to share.

## T-CHART: COMPARE & CONTRAST

SELECTED COMPOSITION	ORIGINAL COMPOSITION
1. SETTING	1. SETTING
2. COSTUMES	2. COSTUMES
3. CHARACTERS	3. CHARACTERS
4. PLOT	4. PLOT
5. MORALE LESSON	5. MORALE LESSON