

MS BENNET'S
YEAR 12 ENGLISH CLASS,
TERM 2, 2015

GOOD MORNING!

"This is a
WONDERFUL DAY
And I have never seen
this one ever before."

Maya Angelou WWW.VERYBESTQUOTES.COM

AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY

An introductory anthology of African American Poetry; there is no one poem that represents the experience of African Americans in the United States. The history of racism is seared deeply into the lives of many African Americans.

Student: _____

Maya Angelou – Still I rise

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXCHKWFmU2s>



Still I Rise Poem by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

To America

How would you have us, as we are?
Or sinking 'neath the load we bear?
Our eyes fixed forward on a star?
Or gazing empty at despair?

Rising or falling? Men or things?
With dragging pace or footsteps fleet?
Strong, willing sinews in your wings?
Or tightening chains about your feet?

James Weldon Johnson

"For Hettie" by Leroi Jones

My wife is left-handed,
which implies a fierce determination.
A complete other worldliness. It's WEIRD
BABY.
The way some folks are always trying to be
different. A sin and a shame.
But then, she's been bohemian
all her life... black stockings,
refusing to take orders. I sit
patiently trying to tell her what's right. TAKE
THAT DAMN PENCIL OUTTA THAT HAND
YOU'RE RITTING BACKWARDS. And
such. But
to no avail. And it shows in her work. Left-
handed coffee, Left-handed eggs; when she
comes in at night... it's her left handed offered
for me to kiss. Damn.
And now her belly droops over the seat.
They say it's a child. But I ain't
quite so sure.

Sadie and Maud

BY GWENDOLYN BROOKS

Maud went to college.

Sadie stayed at home.

Sadie scraped life

With a fine-tooth comb.

She didn't leave a tangle in.

Her comb found every strand.

Sadie was one of the livingest chits

In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies

Under her maiden name.

Maud and Ma and Papa

Nearly died of shame.

When Sadie said her last so-long

Her girls struck out from home.

(Sadie had left as heritage

Her fine-tooth comb.)

Maud, who went to college,

Is a thin brown mouse.

She is living all alone

In this old house.

Harlem

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

American History

BY MICHAEL S. HARPER

Those four black girls blown up
in that Alabama church
remind me of five hundred
middle passage blacks,
in a net, under water
in Charleston harbor
so redcoats wouldn't find them.
Can't find what you can't see
can you?

The Weakness

by Toi Derricotte

That time my grandmother dragged me
through the perfume aisles at Saks, she held me up
by my arm, hissing, "Stand up,"
through clenched teeth, her eyes
bright as a dog's
cornered in the light.
She said it over and over,
as if she were Jesus,
and I were dead. She had been
solid as a tree,
a fur around her neck, a
light-skinned matron whose car was parked, who walked
on swirling
marble and passed through
brass openings--in 1945.
There was not even a black
elevator operator at Saks.
The saleswoman had brought velvet
leggings to lace me in, and cooed,
as if in service of all grandmothers.
My grandmother had smiled, but not
hungrily, not like my mother
who hated them, but wanted to please,
and they had smiled back, as if
they were wearing wooden collars.
When my legs gave out, my grandmother
dragged me up and held me like God
holds saints by the
roots of the hair. I begged her
to believe I couldn't help it. Stumbling,
her face white
with sweat, she pushed me through the crowd, rushing
away from those eyes
that saw through
her clothes, under
her skin, all the way down
to the transparent
genes confessing.

Dreams

by Langston Hughes

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

Ladders

Filene's department store
near nineteen-fifty-three:
An Aunt Jemima floor
display. Red bandanna,

Apron holding white rolls
of black fat fast against
the bubbling pancakes, bowls
and bowls of pale batter.

This is what Donna sees,
across the "Cookwares" floor,
and hears "Donnessa?" *Please,*
This can not be my aunt.

Father's long-gone sister,
nineteen-fifty-three. "Girl?"
Had they lost her, missed her?
This is not the question.

This must not be my aunt.
Jemima? Pays the rent.
Family mirrors haunt
their own reflections.

Ladders. Sisters. Nieces.
As soon as a live Jemima
as a buck-eyed rhesus
monkey. Girl? Answer me.

Elizabeth Alexander



Elizabeth Alexander was born in 1962 in Harlem, New York, and grew up in Washington, D.C. She currently serves as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.

Why Obama chose Elizabeth Alexander for his inauguration

She is a brilliant poet, and brilliantly in tune with the new president

Jay Parini

Friday 19 December 2008 02.17 AEDT

The tradition that a president-elect should choose a poet for his inauguration goes back to JFK and Robert Frost. Frost stole the heart of a nation with his performance on an icy January afternoon in 1961, reciting his poem "The Gift Outright" from memory when he found he could not read the faint typescript of the poem he'd written for the occasion.

I was a kid, watching the inauguration on television, and it was the first time I knew that it meant something to be a poet. Poets could inspire a nation, as Frost did.

Since then, I've watched as the new incumbents have chosen various poets, their choice on each occasion carrying carefully calculated messages. James Dickey, a Southerner to the core, read at Jimmy Carter's ceremony. Bill Clinton asked Maya Angelou in 1993 and Miller Williams in 1997. These were telling choices.

Angelou was a major figure among African-Americans, a poet who had won a large popular audience. Needless to say, Bill Clinton appealed, and tried to appeal, to a black audience. (His success in this respect was enshrined when Toni Morrison famously described him as America's first black president.) Miller Williams was a local choice, a poet from Arkansas, and a very fine one - yet a poet without a large audience. Again, Clinton signalled something with Miller. He was saying: "I'm really a local boy, with roots in Arkansas. Here's what I like."

Perhaps not surprisingly, George Bush had no poet at his inaugurations. It would have been inconsistent with his image. He was no intellectual, and he wanted to say that. A poet might have disturbed the universe (if I may mangle "Prufrock" for the occasion). Oddly enough, Bush did quote Robert Frost in his first inaugural, although his speech writer chose to quote a little-known passage from a graduation speech the poet once gave, not a poem.

Now we learn that president-elect Obama's team (his own personal involvement is not known) has chosen Elizabeth Alexander, a relatively unknown poet in her mid-forties. This is, I think, an inspired choice. Alexander is an African-American poet, born in Harlem in 1962. She's a graduate from Yale - where she is now a professor - and has four wonderful volumes of poetry to her credit, including the recent *American Sublime* (2005), which was shortlisted for the Pulitzer prize in poetry. She is smart, deeply educated in the traditions of poetry, and yet she remains true to her roots, responsive to black culture, as in "Ladders," where she reflects on a live "floor display" at an urban department store in the early 50s. The poem opens:

*Filene's department store
near nineteen-fifty-three:
An Aunt Jemima floor
display. Red bandanna,*

*Apron holding white rolls
of black fat fast against
the bubbling pancakes, bowls
and bowls of pale batter.*

The poem moves to interrogate the image, as someone in the poem called Donna recognises this as her aunt. The girl thinks: "This can not be my aunt." But it is. The aunt calls to her, but the girl is struck dumb. The Jemima figure cries: "Girl? Answer me." But there can be no answer.

I've read Alexander with great pleasure over the past two decades. She writes from the centre of her experience as a black woman, but she makes this viewpoint relevant to every reader, whatever his or her colour.

In a sense, the Obama team remains pitch-perfect here. The choice of Alexander to read is brilliant. She represents black American culture, but she says to the audience: "We're here, and we're very smart and well-educated, fully aware of western European culture in all its complexity; yet we retain an allegiance to our own past, our roots, our needs, our vision."

Topics

Poetry

Barack Obama

Obama inauguration

THEME FOR ENGLISH B

By Langston Hughes

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.

I, Too

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

I, too, sing America.

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

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

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

I, too, am America.

Madam and Her Madam

Langston Hughes

I worked for a woman,
She wasn't mean--
But she had a twelve-room
House to clean.

Had to get breakfast,
Dinner, and supper, too--
Then take care of her children
When I got through.

Wash, iron, and scrub,
Walk the dog around--
It was too much,
Nearly broke me down.

I said, Madam,
Can it be
You trying to make a
Pack-horse out of me?

She opened her mouth.
She cried, Oh, no!
You know, Alberta,
I love you so!

The street light
At his corner
Shined just like a tear--
That boy that they was mournin'
Was so dear, so dear
To them folks that brought the flowers,
To that girl who paid the preacher man--
It was all their tears that made
That poor boy's
Funeral grand.

Night funeral
In Harlem.

Night Funeral in Harlem

Night funeral
In Harlem:

Where did they get
Them two fine cars?

Insurance man, he did not pay--
His insurance lapsed the other day--
Yet they got a satin box
for his head to lay.

Night funeral
In Harlem:

Who was it sent
That wreath of flowers?

Them flowers came
from that poor boy's friends--
They'll want flowers, too,
When they meet their ends.

Night funeral
in Harlem:

Who preached that
Black boy to his grave?

Old preacher man
Preached that boy away--
Charged Five Dollars
His girl friend had to pay.

Night funeral
In Harlem:

When it was all over
And the lid shut on his head
and the organ had done played
and the last prayers been said
and six pallbearers
Carried him out for dead
And off down Lenox Avenue
That long black hearse done sped,

Will V-Day Be Me-Day Too? Lyrics

Langston Hughes

Over There
World War II

Dear Fellow Americans
I write this letter
Hoping times will be better
When this war
Is through
I'm a Tan-skinned Yank
Driving a tank
I ask, WILL V-DAY
BE ME-DAY, TOO?

I wear a U. S. uniform
I've done the enemy much harm
I've driven back
The Germans and the Japs
From Burma to the Rhine
On every battle line
I've dropped defeat
Into the Fascists' laps

I am a Negro American
Out to defend my land
Army, Navy, Air Corps--

I am there
I take munitions through
I fight--or stevedore, too
I face death the same as you do
Everywhere

I've seen my buddy lying
Where he fell
I've watched him dying
I promised him that I would try
To make our land a land
Where his son could be a man--
And there'd be no Jim Crow birds
Left in our sky

So this is what I want to know:
When we see Victory's glow
Will you still let old Jim Crow
Hold me back?
When all those foreign folks who've waite
Italians, Chinese, Danes--are liberated
Will I still be ill-fated
Because I'm black?

Here in my own, my native land
Will the Jim Crow laws still stand?
Will Dixie lynch me still
When I return?
Or will you comrades in arms
From the factories and the farms
Have learned what this war
Was fought for us to learn?

When I take off my uniform
Will I be safe from harm--
Or will you do me
As the Germans did the Jews?
When I've helped this world to save
Shall I still be color's slave?
Or will Victory change
Your antiquated views?

You can't say I didn't fight
To smash the Fascists' might
You can't say I wasn't with you
In each battle
As a soldier, and a friend
When this war comes to an end
Will you herd me in a Jim Crow car
Like cattle?

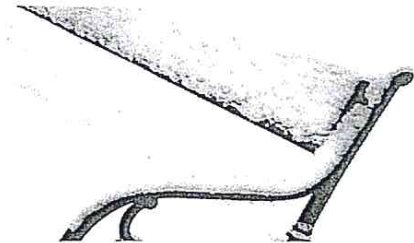
Or will you stand up like a man
At home and take your stand
For Democracy?

That's all I ask of you
When we lay the guns away
To celebrate
Our Victory Day
WILL V-DAY BE ME-DAY, TOO?
That's what I want to know

Sincerely
GI Joe

Figurative language is a tool authors use to help the reader visualize what is happening in a story or poem. Some common types of figurative language are simile, metaphor, personification, alliteration, onomatopoeia, idiom, and puns.

Simile Figure of speech in which the subject is compared to another subject - two dissimilar objects that have something in common use the words *like* or *as*.



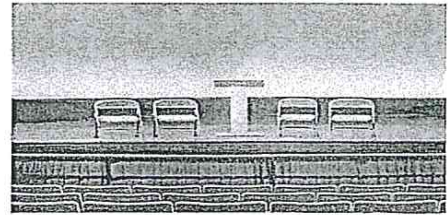
Examples

The snow was like a blanket
Waves crashing on the ocean look like knives
Sadness falls inside me like the rain
I wondered lonely as a cloud

Metaphor Figure of speech in which the two objects are not compared, but treated as identical two unlike things that have something in common without the use of like or as. States that one thing is something else.

Examples

The snow was a blanket over the earth
Fog comes in on little cat's feet
April is my girlfriend's face
All the world's a stage



Personification Assigning human qualities, feelings, action, or characteristics to inanimate (nonhuman) objects.



Examples

father time
whispering trees
babbling brook

How to understand a poem

After reading the entire poem at least twice, deconstruct using these 12 steps.

1. How important is the title? What does it reveal?
2. What is the style of the poem? (eg free verse, sonnet)
What is the rhyme scheme and/or meter (beat)?
3. What is the subject matter of the poem?
4. What themes and/or discourses are mobilised?
5. What is the tone, mood or atmosphere of the poem?
How am I meant to react or feel?
6. How is such a tone established and maintained? (words, phrases, sounds, imagery, rhythm, subject matter.)
7. What is the poet's message or purpose in writing this poem in this way?

8. Identify the values, attitudes or beliefs of the poet or the society he/she writes in. Is the poet challenging, questioning or accepting societal values? Would wider knowledge of the poet and/or the society help me understand this poem more? Research.
9. Which words or phrases are specific to a culture or time period? Use a dictionary or encyclopaedia to find the meaning of words you do not know.
10. Which poetic devices are important in establishing and maintaining the tone, the subject matter, the theme? Have symbols or images been used to add a different layer of meaning to the poem?
11. What is the dominant/invited reading? How is the reader invited to respond?
12. What is a resistant or alternative reading? Who might challenge or reject such idea?