

## *Harlem Renaissance – A Brief Study of Langston Hughes*

Read the following Langston Hughes poems and answer the corresponding questions on your own paper.

1. Read “Harlem” on pg. 828 and answer the following questions:
  - a. What do you think is the most important word in this poem?
  - b. Describe one image that is evoked from that word.
  - c. What is the **mood** of the poem? At what point does the mood shift, and what is the result of the shift?
  - d. Study Jacob Lawrence’s print titled *Harlem Street Scene* on pg. 829. Contrast the mood of the print with the mood of Hughes’s poem.
  
2. Read ‘Heyday in Harlem’ from Hughes’s “When the Negro Was in Vogue” on pg. 831-832 and answer the following questions:
  - a. What is a ‘heyday?’ (Look it up if you need to.)
  - b. Describe the African American view of the Cotton Club in Harlem.
  - c. What was the social atmosphere like in the “upper-crust” of Harlem?
  - d. What is ironic about Hughes’s comment regarding white writers during that time period in Harlem?
  - e. Study Archibald John Motley, Jr.’s painting titled *Jockey Club* on pg. 830. Jockey Club was a popular night club in Chicago. Note the diversity of social types and the skin tones of the figures painted. What about this club suggests its American theme?
  
3. With “I Hear America Singing” and “Let America Be America Again,” Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes, respectively, composed distinctly American poems. In what ways were their approaches similar? In what ways were they different?

To answer these questions, find words or lines in each poem that support the statements indicated on the chart (back of this page). Fill in the appropriate box with the evidence you gather. You may find that a few of the statements are not supported by either poem, or they are contradicted by the poems. In that case, put a check mark in the third column.

- a. After completing the chart, answer this question: What is Hughes’s message to America? (Do not just repeat the title.)

(I Hear America: Whitman, Photography, Democratic Poetry, and Langston Hughes — [http://edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=428](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=428))

## **I Hear America Singing by Walt Whitman**

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe  
and strong,  
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,  
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off  
work,  
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the  
deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,  
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing  
as he stands,  
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the  
morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,  
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at  
work, or of the girl sewing or washing,  
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,  
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young  
fellows, robust, friendly,  
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

## **Let America Be America Again by Langston Hughes**

Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—  
Let it be that great strong land of love  
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme  
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty  
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
But opportunity is real, and life is free,  
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,  
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?  
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,  
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.  
I am the red man driven from the land,

I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—  
And finding only the same old stupid plan  
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,  
Tangled in that ancient endless chain  
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!  
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!  
Of work the men! Of take the pay!  
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.  
I am the worker sold to the machine.  
I am the Negro, servant to you all.  
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—  
Hungry yet today despite the dream.  
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!  
I am the man who never got ahead,  
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream  
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,  
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,  
That even yet its mighty daring sings  
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned  
That's made America the land it has become.  
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas  
In search of what I meant to be my home—  
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,  
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,  
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came  
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?  
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?  
The millions shot down when we strike?  
The millions who have nothing for our pay?  
For all the dreams we've dreamed  
And all the songs we've sung  
And all the hopes we've held  
And all the flags we've hung,  
The millions who have nothing for our pay—  
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—  
The land that never has been yet—  
And yet must be—the land where every man is free.  
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME—  
Who made America,  
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,  
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,  
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—  
The steel of freedom does not stain.

From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,  
We must take back our land again,  
America!

O, yes,  
I say it plain,  
America never was America to me,  
And yet I swear this oath—  
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,  
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,  
We, the people, must redeem  
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.  
The mountains and the endless plain—  
All, all the stretch of these great green states—  
And make America again!

<b>Statement</b>	<b>“I Hear America Singing”</b>	<b>“Let America Be America Again”</b>	<b>Not in either poem. (Check box only.)</b>
The poem relates a personal experience.			
The poem relates common experiences.			
The poet explicitly states the message of the poem.			
The poem describes a variety of events, many of which could be happening at the same time.			
The poet uses elevated language.			
The poet uses the language of the poem’s subjects (people).			