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| **At a Glance – Langston Hughes**   * **Lesson Objective**: Explore theme and variation across a set of poems. * **In the Text:** By examining the poems “Dreams,” “Dream Variations,” and “Harlem,” students analyze the ways in which Langston Hughes developed and evolved in his exploration of the theme of dreams and dreaming over his lifetime. Students explore the tension between optimism and disillusionment as they consider Hughes’s significance as a Harlem Renaissance jazz poet. * **Poem(s):** “Dreams” is in the public domain and is printed in the packet. “Dream Variations” is available here: <https://poets.org/poem/dream-variations>. “Harlem” is available here: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem>. * **Key Questions:** Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8 are the most important questions of the day and should not be skipped. * **Words to Watch For:**   + from “Langston Hughes” Do Now:     - **sentimental idealization**:portraying life in a way that seems ideal but is not realistic     - **roustabouts:** people who work at seaports or oil fields * **Lenox Avenue in New York…:** major streets in majority Black neighborhoods * **installment plan:** paying for something in set amounts over a long period of time * **pawning:** giving an object to someone in exchange for money, in hopes of buying the object back at a later time * **Picasso:** artist from Spain who became famous for modern art that broke the rules of traditional painting * **pretension:** thinking you are more important, successful, or impressive than you actually are   + from “Dreams:”     - **barren:** empty and unable to produce life   + from “Harlem”:     - **deferred:** delayed or put off; to do at a later time     - **fester:** become more painful, rotten, or infected as time passes |
| **Agenda:**   * Do Now (10 minutes) * Cycle 1 – FASE Reading and Read Aloud: “Dreams” (20 minutes) * Cycle 2 – AIR: “Dream Variations” (20 minutes) * Cycle 3 – FASE Reading and Read Aloud: “Harlem” (20 minutes) * Exit Ticket (10 minutes) |
| Lesson Plan **Do Now (10 minutes)**   * Give students 6-7 minutes to read the article about Langston Hughes and answer **Q1-Q2** independently. Then, review student responses using **Cold Call, Show Call, share out,** or a **brief discussion**. * **Q1:** **In your own words, describe the subject(s) that Hughes wrote about.**    + Hughes wrote about the lives of ordinary Black people in America. He focused on the struggles and joys that they experienced every day. * **Q2: Explain the meaning of this line: Hughes’s poetry is about “people up today and down tomorrow, working this week and fired the next, beaten and baffled, but determined not to be wholly beaten.”**   + Hughes writes poetry about people who waver between success and struggle, who deal with the trials of life, who are often dealing with hardship but refuse to give up. |
| **Cycle 1 (20 minutes) — “Dreams”**   * **Read**: Use **FASE Reading** and/or **Read Aloud** to read “Dreams.” Students may jot notes on the subject/speaker/audience. * **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q1a**, then **Turn and Talk** about **Q1b**. * **Discuss**: **Share out** a few strong ideas about **Q1a**, then lead a **brief discussion** of **Q1b** to surface a variety of ideas. If student understanding is strong and pacing allows, move on to the **Challenge** and lead a **brief discussion** to debrief.   + **Q1a: The phrase “hold fast” means to tightly secure something so that it does not get lost or broken. What do you think it means to “Hold fast to dreams”?**     - The speaker is urging the audience to protect and maintain their dreams; don’t give up on them or let them go.   + **Q1b: What kind of dreams does the speaker seem to be talking about? How important are dreams to the speaker of the poem? How do you know?**     - The dreams the speaker is talking about are dreams for one’s life (goals, ambitions, deep desires, etc.). These dreams seem incredibly important to the speaker. The two metaphors are so dramatic that they paint a picture of life being brutal if one doesn’t have dreams. The repetition of the phrase “hold fast to dreams” also emphasizes the dreams’ importance.   + **Challenge: Consider what you learned about the Harlem Renaissance in yesterday’s lesson. Why might “holding fast” to one’s dreams be an important message for Hughes to communicate to his readers?**     - This might be an important message to convey because many African Americans suffered from social disillusionment. It would be very easy for people who have endured such suffering to give up on dreams, yet this poem conveys that a life without dreams would be hardly a life at all. * **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q2**. * **Discuss:** Lead a **brief discussion** of **Q2**.   + **Q2a: What is the difference between a “broken-winged bird” and a bird that cannot fly? Why might that difference be important to the poem?**      - A broken-winged bird has been injured or deformed, so it can’t fly as it is naturally meant to do, while a bird that cannot fly might have been born that way. This difference is important because it implies that something has been lost or harmed; the broken-winged bird is not as it is supposed to be.   + **Q2b: Explain what Hughes might be trying to convey in the metaphor of the broken-winged bird.**     - (If needed) Drop in the definition of metaphor: a comparison between two unlike things.     - Hughes is trying to say that without dreams (or failing to hold onto dreams), then life is severely limited or perhaps not even a full life at all. Without dreams, our lives cannot be what they are naturally meant to be. |
| **Cycle 2 (20 minutes) – “Dream Variations”**   * **Read:** Ask students to use **AIR** to read “Dream Variations.” Students can jot notes about the subject/speaker/audience and should underline references to day and night. * **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q3.** * **Discuss:** **Show Call or share out** a few strong responses to **Q3**.   + **Q3: In one clear sentence, explain the dream the speaker describes in this poem.**      - The speaker dreams about being able to joyfully dance around in the sun all day and to rest peacefully at night. * **Write**: Ask students to **Turn and Talk** to respond to **Q4a**, then answer **Q4b-c** independently. * **Discuss**: Lead a **brief discussion** of **Q4**, focusing mostly on **Q4b-c**.   + **Q4a: Review your annotations of descriptions of day and night. What patterns do you notice?**     - Many possible responses. Patterns include: day is associated with white/brightness, whereas night is described as similar to the speaker and is portrayed as positive and gentle.   + **Q4b: How would you describe the speaker’s relationship with night? Why might they feel this way?**     - The speaker seems to have a strong relationship with the night and feels positively about it. The speaker describes the night as “tender” and “gentle” and says that the night is “dark” and “black” like them.   + **Q4c: In literature, night is often associated with scary, dangerous, or negative forces. How is Hughes’s description of night different, and why might that be?**     - Hughes’s description is different because he describes night in a positive way, making it seem soft and easy. By describing night this way and connecting it to the speaker’s identity, he shifts from a traditional negative connotation of night to a positive one that uplifts the dream that the speaker describes. * **Discuss:** Ask student to **Turn and Talk** to discuss **Q5**, then lead a **brief discussion** whole group. Ask students to take notes to capture ideas shared during discussion.   + **Q5: What connections do you see between “Dreams” and “Dream Variations”? Consider both the themes and the structure.**     - Thematic connections: both focus on the importance of dreams and how they affect one’s life (positively or negatively).     - Structural connections: both poems use repetition and rhyme to convey their themes. This can give the poems a dream-like quality in the way that you can have the same dream over and over.     - ***Note:*** *This is meant to be an open-ended discussion that need not end with one clear stamp. Students should start to share a variety of ideas to help prepare them for the next cycle. Teachers should redirect and respond to misconceptions but allow for a variety of interpretations to surface.* |
| **Cycle 3 (20 minutes) – “Harlem”**   * **Read:** Use **FASE Reading** or **Read Aloud** to read, “Harlem.” * **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q6a**, then **Turn and Talk** about **Q6b**. * **Discuss:** **Share out** a few strong ideas from students’ responses to **Q6**.   + If needed: Drop in definition of simile: A comparison between two unlike things using words such as *like, as, than,* or *seems.*   + **Q6a: Underline the similes that Hughes uses to describe dreams in this poem. Which simile is most compelling to you? Why?**     - Many possible responses. Students should speak either to the graphic, vivid nature of the imagery and/or the emotion of how the similes relate to the ideas of dreams deferred.   + **Q6b: What do the similes have in common? Why do you think that is?**     - All the similes seem to illustrate when dreams are ignored or put off for too long. They show the decay, rot, and heaviness of neglect. The speaker uses several similes to help describe the various ways in which people may be affected when their dreams are not fulfilled. * **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q7.** * **Discuss:** Lead a **brief discussion** of **Q7**.   + **Q7: How is the last line different from the rest of the poem? Why do you think Hughes might have written it this way? Think about both structure and theme.**     - The last line is different from the rest of the poem because it is italicized and the only line other than the first that is by itself.     - Structurally, Hughes did this to create a dramatic finish that stands out and “explodes” the end of the poem in a way. Such a deliberate break in the form of the poem catches one’s eye and ear and makes the ending stand out.     - Thematically, it might represent the actual effect that Hughes believes happens when dreams are deferred, or the logical conclusion to what happens when dreams are continuously deferred. * **Write:** Ask students to respond to **Q8**. * **Discuss:** Lead a **brief discussion** of **Q8**. If student understanding is strong and pacing allows, move onto the challenge question and **share out** a few ideas.   + **Q8: The table below shows the year in which each poem was written and the age at which Hughes published it. Imagine these poems all share the same speaker, communicating these ideas over the course of 49 years. What “story” might they tell when read together? How does the speaker’s point of view seem to change over time?**     - These poems seem to tell the story of how dreams can uplift but also of how their denial can be crushing. If these poems shared the same speaker, they could tell the story of a person who had big dreams (and possibly moved to Harlem in pursuit of them), but that over the course of years they couldn’t pursue them for some reason. After twenty-five years, it seems they might realize the damaging result of not being able to fulfill their dreams.       * **Possible Supporting Questions:**         + Think about how much time passes between the time “Dreams” and “Harlem” were written. What does that suggest?         + How are the themes in “Dreams” and “Dream Variations” different from those in “Harlem”?   + **Challenge: Would you consider these poems melancholic? Why or why not?**     - ‘Melancholic’ is a vocabulary word introduced in Lesson 8.     - Many possible responses. Some students might see them as melancholic because of the focus on dreams being prevented or lost, or they may connect to what they’ve already learned from earlier lessons. They may see “Harlem” as the only result of dreams for African Americans in this time period.     - Conversely, some students may think the poems hold a sense of perseverance and fortitude. They may also see the final line of “Harlem” as a potential positive because an explosion affects more than just one person to cause a change or revolution. * **Discuss:** Ask students to **Turn and Talk** about **Q9**, then **share out** a few ideas.   + **Q9: The title of the final poem in this set is “Harlem.” Why might this title be significant?**     - The title of this poem might be significant because it could be signifying that Harlem is a place where dreams are continually deferred for African Americans. It might also mean that the speaker/Hughes has experienced this or seen this happen for many people living in Harlem. * **Write:** Ask students to jot initial ideas about **Q10.** * **Discuss:** Lead a **brief discussion** about **Q10.**   + **Q10: Why do you think a poet might return to the same theme or idea multiple times over the course of their life?**     - Many possible responses; poets might continue to return to ideas that interest them or are relevant to their lives, poets might want to examine how their point of view changes about something important to them, they might experience significant events that change their perspective, etc.     - ***Note:*** *The purpose here is to surface a variety of reasonable ideas. Teachers need not arrive at a single conclusion or stamp.* |
| **Exit Ticket (10 minutes)**   * **Q1: In 3-5 sentences, explain how “Dreams,” “Dream Variation,” and “Harlem,” are variations on a similar theme. Consider similarities and differences in both the ideas and structures of the poems.**   + These poems are variations of each other because they each show a different aspect of having dreams for one’s life. They share the same theme about the importance of dreams. Both “Dreams” and “Harlem” convey a sense of despair when dreams cannot be fulfilled. “Dream Variation” on the other hand, shows the power and beauty of dreams, and how important they can be to our own identities. Structurally, the poems share a sense of repetition with the rhyme scheme and repeated images/ideas. |

**Bibliography**

**Do Now –** **Langston Hughes**

“Langston Hughes.” *The Poetry Foundation. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/langston-hughes*