

Name: _____ Class: _____

Harlem

By Langston Hughes
1951

Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was an African American poet, novelist, and social activist. He was an important leader of the Harlem Renaissance, a social, cultural, and artistic movement in Harlem, New York during the 1920s. In this poem, a speaker wonders what happens to dreams when they are postponed. As you read, take notes on what the speaker compares to dreams that are delayed.

[1] What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester¹ like a sore —

[5] And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over —
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
[10] like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?



["Langston Hughes"](#) by bswise is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates Incorporated. Copyright 1994 by the Langston Hughes Estate

1. to become infected

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which sentence describes the main idea of the poem?
 - A. Some dreams need more time to develop and grow.
 - B. It's difficult for people to keep their dreams alive.
 - C. No one knows what happens to dreams that are never fulfilled.
 - D. Dreams that are delayed could disappear or become a burden.

2. PART B: Which detail from the poem best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "What happens to a dream deferred?" (Line 1)
 - B. "like a raisin in the sun?" (Line 3)
 - C. "Does it stink like rotten meat?" (Line 6)
 - D. "like a syrupy sweet?" (Line 8)

3. Which statement explains the simile, "Maybe it just sags / like a heavy load" (Lines 9-10)?
 - A. It can be difficult to know that a dream stopped serving its purpose.
 - B. It can be frustrating to see a dream fail to become a reality.
 - C. A postponed dream can become something difficult to carry.
 - D. Dreams can easily bounce back after being neglected for some time.

4. How do the similes that the speaker uses throughout the poem contribute to the negative portrayal of deferred dreams?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the poem, the speaker explores what might happen to dreams that are postponed. What do you think could make someone postpone their dreams? What do you think Langston Hughes would say to someone who was thinking about putting off their dreams?
2. In the poem, the speaker describes largely negative things that could happen to a dream deferred. Do you think that there are times when it is best to put a dream off? Why or why not?
3. Describe a dream that you have that you plan to achieve. Why are you passionate about this dream?