

Harlem: A Poem

By Walter Dean Myers*

¹They took the road in Waycross, Georgia
Skipped over the tracks in East St. Louis
Took the bus from Holly Springs
Hitched a ride from Gee's Bend
Took the long way through Memphis
The third deck down from Trinidad
A wrench of heart from Goree Island
To a place called
Harlem

²Harlem was a promise
Of a better life,
of a place where a man
Didn't have to *know his place*
Simply because
He was Black

³They brought a call
A song
First heard in the villages of
Ghana, Mali, Senegal
Calls and songs and shouts
Heavy hearted tambourine rhythms
Loosed in the hard city
Like a scream torn from the throat
Of an ancient clarinet

⁴A new sound, raucous and sassy
Cascading over the asphalt village
Breaking against the black sky
Announcing Hallelujah
Riffing past resolution

⁵Yellow, tan, brown, black, red
Green, gray, bright
Colors loud enough to be heard
Sun yellow shirts on *burnt umber*
Bodies
demanding to be heard
Seen
sending out warriors

⁶From streets *known to be*
Mourning still as a lone radio tells us how
Jack Johnson
Joe Louis
Sugar Ray
Is doing with our hopes.

⁷We hope
We pray
Our black skins
Reflecting the face of God
In storefront temples
The mood *indigo*.

*abridged

⁸A carnival of children
People in the daytime streets
Stickball heroes
Living out their own slam-dunk dreams
Listening
For the coming of the blues
A weary blues that Langston knew.

⁹There is *lilt*
Tempo
Cadence
A language of darkness
Darkness known
Darkness sharpened at Mintons
Darkness lightened at the Cotton Club
Sent flying from Abyssinian Baptist
To the Apollo.

¹⁰One people
A hundred different people
Huddled masses
And crowded dreams

¹¹Cracked reed and soprano sax laughter
Floats over
a fleet of funeral cars
In Harlem
The wind doesn't blow past
It *stops to listen* to the sounds

¹²Serious business
A poem, rhapsody tripping along
Striver's Row
Not getting it's metric feel soiled
On the well-swept walks
Hustling through the hard rain at two o'clock
In the morning *to its next gig*.

¹³Sometimes despair
Makes the stoops shudder
Sometimes there are endless depths of pain
Singing a capella on street corners
And sometimes not.
Sometimes it is the artist
looking into the mirror
Painting a portrait of his own heart.

¹⁴Place
Sound
Celebration
Memories of feelings
Of place

¹⁵A journey on the A train
That started on the banks of the Niger
And *has not ended*

¹⁶Harlem.

Name: _____ Period: 1 3 4 5

Harlem Renaissance Poetry Analysis

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Answer each question using complete sentences.

1. In your opinion, what is the **MOOD** of the poem? (***Mood** is the overall feeling of the poem. This can be created by the TONE, which is the "voice" that you imagine the poem is read in, or by the language choices of the poem. Provide examples to support your answer.*)

2. What is the overall **THEME** of the poem? (*The **theme** is its underlying message, or 'big idea.'* In other words, what critical belief about life is the author trying to convey in the poem? This belief, or idea, transcends cultural barriers. It is usually universal in nature. Provide examples to support your answer.)

3. What passage in the poem most spoke to you? *Provide the passage; tell what you found the most striking.*

4. How does Myers' poem tell the story of African-Americans in the United States? *Provide examples of where the poem references history.*

5. In what ways might the poem represent the story of ALL Americans? *Provide examples of where the poem references events or beliefs that might have been shared by those not directly connected to the African American experience.*