Harlem: A Poem
By Walter Dean Myers*

1. They 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

2. Harlem 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

3. They 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

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

5. Yellow, 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

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

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

*abridged
A 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.

There 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.

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

Cracked 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

Serious 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*.

Sometimes 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.

Place
Sound
Celebration
Memories of feelings
Of place

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

Harlem.
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.

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.*