



Name _____ Date _____

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Part I: Writers of the Harlem Renaissance often confronted issues of race, politics and belonging in their works, even though their styles varied widely. Read the poems below, and circle three to five lines in each that stand out to you.

America

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth.
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
Giving me strength erect against her hate,
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.
Yet, as a rebel fronts a king in state,
I stand within her walls with not a shred
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.
Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,
And see her might and granite wonders there,
Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,
Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.

– Claude McKay (1921)

I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

– Langston Hughes (1926)



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Part II: Compare and contrast the poems on the previous page.

1. How do the poems differ in style? What literary devices (figurative language, metaphor, simile, etc.) does each author use?

2. What does each poem say about America? Why do you think this is?

3. In what ways are Hughes' and McKay's views on America similar? In what ways do they differ?
