

Name _____

Date _____

Langston Hughes's "Harlem"

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. James Mercer Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, on February 1, 1902. His parents divorced when he was young, and he was raised by his grandmother until he was 13. He was often lonely as a child and spent a lot of time reading. As a teenager, Hughes moved to Lincoln, Illinois, to live with his mother and her husband. He began writing poetry that year. A year later, the family moved to Cleveland, Ohio. Despite all the moving around, Hughes did well in high school and was popular with his fellow students. During his senior year, he was voted class poet and editor of the yearbook.

Which of these is true about Langston Hughes's childhood?

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| A. Hughes was mainly raised by his single father in Joplin, Missouri. | B. Hughes moved around a lot and lived with different family members. |
| C. Hughes started writing poetry when he was five years old. | D. Hughes was lonely and unpopular until he left high school. |

2. After graduating from high school, Hughes studied for a year at Columbia University in New York City. He published his first poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," in 1921. Hughes quickly became one of the most important writers of the Harlem Renaissance, the movement of African-American literary, artistic and musical culture in the 1920s. He was the first African American to make a living as a writer. Hughes was known for telling the stories of black Americans in authentic ways. His work reflected the diversity of African Americans' language, relationships, suffering, joy and love of music. He wrote about discrimination in America and how it affected people in his communities. He used simple language and themes that could be understood by anyone who could read.

Which of these best describes Hughes's writing?

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| A. focusing on the pain, sorrow and anger of African Americans | B. emphasizing the importance of religion in America |
| C. imagining a world where racism and segregation no longer exist | D. echoing African Americans' everyday realities |

3. Hughes was famous for his lyrical writing. He wrote many poems that were influenced by the rhythm of jazz and blues music. He also often used figurative language to emphasize the themes he wrote about. One example of figurative language is simile. In a simile, the writer compares two different things using “like” or “as.” In “Harlem,” Hughes uses similes to compare “a dream deferred” to several things. Does it dry up “like a raisin in the sun,” a juicy fruit that has become dry and shriveled? He wonders if it stinks “like rotten meat” or forms a crust “like a syrupy sweet.” Maybe it “sags like a heavy load,” becoming a burden on the carrier. These comparisons create vivid images of what an unrealized dream might look like.

Which of the following sentences contain similes?

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| A. “During the first call she sat with every limb gracefully composed, every fold correctly draped, calm as a summer sea, cool as a snowbank, and as silent as the sphinx.”
(Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*) | B. “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” (Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*) |
| C. “Do you not think that there are things which you cannot understand, and yet which are; that some people see things that others cannot?” (Bram Stoker, *Dracula*) | D. “I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You can’t go anywhere without meeting clever people.” (Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*) |

4. In “Harlem,” Hughes uses a rhetorical device called anaphora. Anaphora is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive sentences, clauses or verses. Repeating the same words adds emphasis to an important idea or theme. It lends a pleasant rhythm to a poem or passage. Writers sometimes use anaphora to help persuade, inspire or motivate their audience. A famous example of anaphora is the first sentence of Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

Why would an author most likely use anaphora?

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| A. to confuse a reader | B. to make their writing longer |
| C. to provide context | D. to emphasize an idea |