

Theme in the Poetry of Langston Hughes

Directions: Much of a poem’s meaning involves interpreting specific passages. This chart will help you analyze the poems of Langston Hughes and explain common themes in his poems. You are given a theme in the right column. In the left column, provide a specific example from a poem. In the middle column, identify the method used (imagery, metaphor, simile, etc.). Be sure to analyze and explain how the example supports the theme.

Specific Example	Method, Explanation and Analysis	Theme
<p>“Hold fast to dreams For when dreams go Life is a barren field Frozen with snow.” (5-8) ---“Dreams”---</p>	<p>Each stanza in “Dreams” contains a metaphor. The second stanza compares a life without dreams to a “barren field frozen with snow.” A field is created for the purpose of providing life. A barren field does not fulfill its purpose. A life is created to give and provide life to others. A life without dreams does nothing.</p>	<p>A Life without Dreams is not Worth Living</p>
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		<p>The Founding Principles of the United States Must be Applied to African Americans!</p>
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		<p>Sometimes Life is Hard!</p>

Theme in the Poetry of Langston Hughes (Sample Answers)

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<p>“Hold fast to dreams For when dreams go Life is a barren field Frozen with snow.” (5-8) ---“Dreams”---</p>	<p>Each stanza in “Dreams” contains a metaphor. The second stanza compares a life without dreams to a “barren field frozen with snow.” A field is created for the purpose of providing life. A barren field does not fulfill its purpose. A life is created to give and provide life to others. A life without dreams does nothing.</p>	<p>A Life without Dreams is not Worth Living</p>
<p>Maybe it just sags like a heavy load. Or does it explode? ---“What Happens to a Dream Deferred”---</p>	<p>A dreamless life weighs on the individual. There’s no energy, no vitality...until anger takes over, causing an explosion. This can be interpreted as a destructive force—an I’m sick and tired so I’ll burn down the ghetto—or a creative force—an I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired so I’m gonna make something of myself. Most scholars conclude the former.</p>	<p>A Life without Dreams is not Worth Living</p>
<p>“I have as much right As the other fellow has To stand On my two feet And own the land.” ---“Democracy”---</p>	<p>Hughes challenges the hypocrisy of those in power and takes a stand for freedom, claiming the God-given rights stated in the Declaration of Independence and guaranteed by the United States Constitution apply to him as much as any other man, regardless of race. This is essentially what Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech states.</p>	<p>The Founding Principles of the United States Must be Applied to African Americans!</p>
<p>“I, too, sing America. I am the darker brother.” ---“I Too Sing America”---</p>	<p>This poem foretells the future of Civil Rights in the United States. At the time of this poem’s writing, segregation was commonplace. What Hughes realizes is those who feel African-Americans are inferior overlook his people’s strengths, insomuch that they are growing stronger. Hughes predicts a day when to mistreat a minority will lead to serious ramifications.</p>	<p>The Founding Principles of the United States Must be Applied to African Americans!</p>
<p>“When the shoe strings break On both your shoes And you’re in a hurry- That’s the blues.” ---“The Blues”---</p>	<p>Hughes presents real life scenarios that irritate, not serious things like losing a kidney or having you dog die, but little things, things universal to the human race. In this case, it doesn’t matter what color your skin is, things happen.</p>	<p>Sometimes Life Sucks!</p>

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