

## “American Dream” Literature

*Directions:* Read the two literary pieces below. Then answer the questions.

Artifact	<b>A: Poem: <u>A Dream Deferred</u></b> by Langston Hughes	<b>B: Essay Excerpt: <u>How it feels to Colored Me</u></b> by Zora Neale Hurston
Literary Piece	<p>What happens to a dream deferred?          Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?          Or fester like a sore—          And then run?          Does it stink like rotten meat?          Or crust and sugar over—          like a syrupy sweet?          Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.          Or does it explode?</p>	<p>Sometimes it is the other way around. A white person is set down in our midst, but the contrast is just as sharp for me. For instance, when I sit in the drafty basement that is The New World Cabaret with a white person, my color comes. We enter chatting about any little nothing that we have in common and are seated by the jazz waiters.</p> <p>In the abrupt way that jazz orchestras have, this one plunges into a number. It loses no time in circumlocutions, but gets right down to business. It constricts the thorax and splits the heart with its tempo and narcotic harmonies. This orchestra grows rambunctious, rears on its hind legs and attacks the tonal veil with primitive fury, rending it, clawing it until it breaks through to the jungle beyond. I follow those heathen--follow them exultingly. I dance wildly inside myself; I yell within, I whoop; I shake my assegai above my head, I hurl it true to the mark yeeeeooww! I am in the jungle and living in the jungle way. My face is painted red and yellow and my body is painted blue. My pulse is throbbing like a war drum. I want to slaughter something--give pain, give death to what, I do not know. But the piece ends. The men of the orchestra wipe their lips and rest their fingers. I creep back slowly to the veneer we call civilization with the last tone and find the white friend sitting motionless in his seat, smoking calmly.</p> <p>"Good music they have here," he remarks, drumming the table with his fingertips.</p> <p>Music. The great blobs of purple and red emotion have not touched him. He has only heard what I felt. He is far away and I see him but dimly across the ocean and the continent that have fallen between us. He is so pale with his whiteness then and I am so colored.</p> <p>At certain times I have no race, I am me. When I set my hat at a certain angle and saunter down Seventh Avenue, Harlem City, feeling as snooty as the lions in front of the Forty-Second Street Library, for instance. So far as my feelings are concerned, Peggy Hopkins Joyce on the Boule Mich with her gorgeous raiment, stately carriage, knees knocking together in a most aristocratic manner, has nothing on me. The cosmic Zora emerges. I belong to no race nor time. I am the eternal feminine with its string of beads.</p> <p>I have no separate feeling about being an American citizen and colored. I am merely a fragment of the Great Soul that surges within the boundaries. My country, right or wrong.</p> <p>Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me.</p>

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Context	<p><b>Harlem</b> was written in 1951 during a time when many blacks felt limited in their ability to achieve 'The American Dream.' Although the Civil War was long over and blacks technically had the right to vote, schools were still segregated and many blacks could only find basic jobs that didn't provide them with a future.</p>	<p>Hurston grew up in the African American town of Eatonville, Florida. Between 1865 and 1900 more than 100 independent towns were founded by African Americans escaping racial prejudice. Hurston's early exposure to Whites was tourists passing through Eatonville. Hurston wrote the essay <i>How it Feels to be Colored Me</i> in 1928 exploring the differences between Whites and Blacks.</p>
Word Bank	<p><b>Deferred</b>-to put off</p>	<p><b>New World Cabaret</b>-a club  <b>circumlocutions</b>-the use of more words than necessary to express an idea  <b>constrict</b>-to squeeze or compress  <b>thorax</b>-part of body, chest  <b>exultingly</b>-joyously  <b>assegai</b>-a type of light spear used in southern Africa.  <b>veneer</b>-superficial, desirable outside covering something less desirable inside  <b>Peggy Hopkins Joyce on the Boule Mich</b>-a wealthy women walking along the Boulevard Saint-Michel in Paris.  <b>raiment</b>-clothing  <b>aristocratic</b>- noble, elite, upper-class, "blue-blooded"  <b>cosmic</b>-relating to the universe</p>

Source: Hughes, Langston. "Harlem." *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem).

Source: Nordquist, Richard. "Zora Neale Hurston's Classic Essay on Race and Identity." *ThoughtCo*, ThoughtCo, 16 May 2016, [www.thoughtco.com/how-it-feels-to-be-colored-me-by-zora-neale-hurston-1688772](http://www.thoughtco.com/how-it-feels-to-be-colored-me-by-zora-neale-hurston-1688772).

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**Historical Inquiry Questions**

Question	Poem	Essay
When was it written?		
What was going on in the U.S. at the time? (Look in the context section)		
Why might someone be interested in this message?		
What is similar in the two literary pieces?		
What is different in the two literary pieces?		
How might the context of the U.S. affect the content of the piece?		