

Poetry Analysis/Primary Source Analysis

“Harlem” (1951)

By: Langston Hughes

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?

Read the poem two or three times. Write a brief summary of the poem in your own words.

What do you think the poem means?

Think about the meaning of the poem, not just the obvious meaning of each word but what they mean beyond the literal.

Answer these questions:

- What is the subject of the poem? _____
- Why do you think the author wrote the poem?

- When is the poem happening? _____
- What feelings does Hughes' capture in the poem?

Historical and cultural context

Describe the conditions in the United States that may have influenced Hughes to write this poem.
