A Dream Deferred

Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

1 What happens to a dream deferred*?
2 Does it dry up
3 like a raisin in the sun?
4 Or fester** like a sore - -
5 And then run?
6 Does it stink like rotten meat?
7 Or crust and sugar over - -
8 like a syrupy sweet?
9 Maybe it just sags
10 like a heavy load.
11 Or does it explode?

*To put off; postpone.
**To undergo decay; rot.
"A Dream Deferred"
Langston Hughes

1. Identify and label the **rhyme scheme** (see back for 'What is Rhyme Scheme' handout →).

2. Highlight and label all the **poetic devices** in the poem (see back for 'Poetry 101' →).

3. Explain the poet's message in "A Dream Deferred." Use specific examples from the text to support your response.

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4. Compare and contrast this poem to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have Dream" speech in regards to meaning and message.

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5. Do you have a dream that has been deferred? Or a goal you have put off? Explain. If not, how have you avoided delaying or putting off your dream(s)/goal(s)? Explain.

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It has been said that poetry is most emotionally charged means of written expression. It consists of words arranged in patterns of sound (rhythm) and pictures (imagery) to spark an emotional and intellectual response from the reader. Poetry is considered the language of the imagination, of feelings, of emotional self-expression.

Imagery is when an author uses vivid (vibrant) verbs and adjectives to paint a picture of a time, place, experience, or emotion through detailed images that appeal to the senses of the reader. This is sometimes accomplished through the use of figurative language (simile, metaphor, etc.) and implementation of literary devices (symbolism, allusion, irony, etc.).

Rhythm is a beat or pattern of sound. Rhythm is used to make words and meaning ‘dance’ to a specific beat so their message can be conveyed with proper feeling. Rhythm can be created in a number of ways including, but not limited to, repetition of words or word sounds, the use of alliteration, the intentional placement (or lack) of punctuation (such as commas and dashes), and specifically chosen words with syllabic similarities (similar sounds/number of syllables).

Rhyme occurs when there is a regular recurrence of corresponding (parallel or equivalent) sounds, especially at the ends of lines of poetry.

A stanza is a set of lines in a poem set apart from other sets of lines by space. Each stanza comprises its own unit. The break/space between stanzas generally indicates a pause between thoughts, concepts, or actions. In standard practice, most poems end a sentence at the end of stanza, though there is no definitive rule that says this must happen.

What is Rhyme Scheme?

A rhyme scheme is a regular pattern of rhyme that occurs at the ends of the lines in a poem. The pattern, most often, is consistent throughout the extent of the poem.

Rhyme schemes are labeled according to their rhyme sounds. Every rhyme sound is given its own letter of the alphabet to distinguish it from the other rhyme sounds that may appear in the poem.

For example, the first rhyme sound of a poem is designated as ‘A.’ Every time that rhyme sound appears in the poem, no matter where it is found, it is called ‘A.’

The second rhyme sound to appear in the poem is designated ‘B.’ Every other time that rhyme sound appears in the poem, no matter where it is found, it is called ‘B.’ The third rhyme sound to appear would be ‘C,’ the fourth ‘D,’ and so on, for as many rhyme sounds as appear in the poem.

The following short poem illustrates the labeling of a rhyme scheme.

There once was a big brown cat A
That liked to eat a lot of mice B
He got all round and fat A
Because they tasted so nice B