

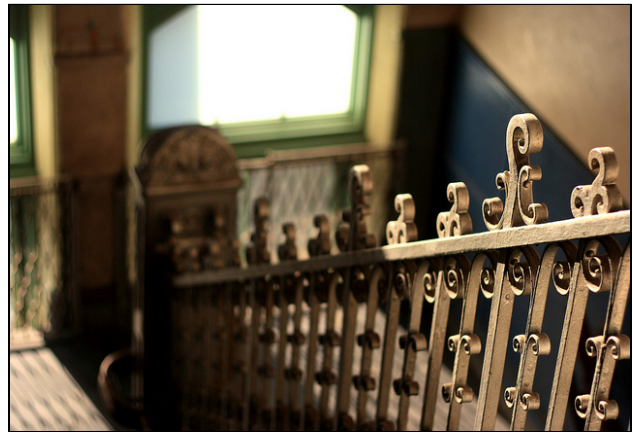
Name: _____ Class: _____

Mother to Son

By Langston Hughes
1922

Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was an American poet, activist, novelist, and playwright. He is also considered one of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, which was the cultural, social, and artistic movement of black artists that took place in Harlem between the end of World War I and the mid-1930s. The following poem is written in free verse and the vernacular, mimicking normal speech patterns. As you read, take notes on the metaphor and larger message presented in the text.

- [1] Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
[5] And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor –
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
[10] And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
[15] Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now –
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
[20] And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.



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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. In the poem, who is speaking to whom, and about what? [RL.3]
 - A. A mother is telling a story to her child about her own childhood.
 - B. A mother is speaking to her son about climbing a crystal staircase.
 - C. A son is recounting a conversation his mother had with him about the general struggle towards earning a comfortable living.
 - D. A mother is warning her son about the difficulties of life and the struggle to persevere.

2. What is the central metaphor utilized in the poem? [RL.5]
 - A. The narrator describes a laborious climb up a decrepit staircase, a figurative depiction of her ongoing struggles in life.
 - B. The narrator compares a crystal staircase to her own life, symbolic of her own goals and the struggle towards them.
 - C. The narrator describes her ascension up a poorly-kept staircase which transforms into a crystal one, representing her strive to rise above difficulties.
 - D. The narrator describes herself going down a decrepit staircase, a figurative depiction of her continued problems.

3. Describe the language or style used in the poem. How does this form contribute to the author's purpose? [RL.6]

4. PART A: Which of the following statements best describes the theme of the poem? [RL.2]
 - A. Never forget your family.
 - B. Persevere when life isn't easy.
 - C. Hope is the answer to all challenges.
 - D. Respect your elders.

5. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
- A. "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair."
 - B. "...sometimes goin' in the dark / Where there ain't been no light."
 - C. "Don't you set down on the steps / 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard."
 - D. "I'se still goin', honey, / I'se still climbin'"

6. Using evidence from the poem, explain the narrator's perspective on persistence, struggle, and the American Dream, especially in context of the author's and the text's relation to the Harlem Renaissance. [RL.6]

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. In your opinion, do all Americans have equal access to the American dream? What are some of the factors that could make it easier or harder to achieve happiness in America?
2. How do we achieve our goals and/or the American Dream? How does circumstance, status, and identity factor into this? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. In the context of this poem, how do people overcome adversity? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
4. In the context of this poem, what is the meaning of family? Specifically, what does it mean to be a mother or a son? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.