

List two details from the writer's biography that might have influenced the writing or your understanding of the poem.

1. Cortez had a "deeply etched sense of female identity"/ poetry addressed social issues like mysogyny
2. poetry was chanted to music/deeply influenced by jazz; a jazz tune inspired the poem

As you read the poem: Underline parts that relate to historical facts, especially African American issues
Circle words/phrases that stir up emotions
Place a question mark next to ideas that you don't recognize and may need to research
Place [] around parts of the poem that seem musical (call and response, rhythm, refrain, repetition, etc.)

After you read the poem, answer the following questions, quoting parts of the poem that led to your responses:

1. What historical background does a reader need to better understand this poem?

Ellington's Song "A Drum is a Woman," MX missiles, drums in the history of jazz
Social issues: Violence against women,
Chauvinism: "your drum is not inferior," "oppression," "docile," "invisible"

2. How does the poem relate to African American issues or jazz? Refer to historical context and text of the poem.

The violence referred to could be perceived an African American issue as well as against women
The metaphor of a woman as a drum is deeply musical; the drum creates much of the rhythm of jazz

3. Look at the emotional words you circled. Are those emotions more negative, or more positive? Both?
What emotions do you think the writer wanted those words make you feel?

Negative words: "pistol whipping," "bitterness," "choking," "raping"
The author "pounds" the audience with negative images to emphasize the abuse of women in society

4. What musical qualities of the poem or song lyrics might influence the audience? How?

Call and Response: Why are you... phrases ask for a response from the audience
Riff: Why phrases are repeated, your drum is phrases, "don't abuse your drum" repeated 3 times toward the beginning of the poem and then again at the end of the poem, helping to created rhythm

5. Think about your responses to questions 2-4. What might the poet be persuading the audience to think or do? Write your responses in a sentence.

Cortez's social message is painfully clear: stop abusing women

6. What did you learn from reading this poem?
