

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

1. Kaufman's Beat Generation distrust and disgust about Vietnam
2. Grew up with jazz in New Orleans

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?

"atomicolorcinemascope" refers to WWII atomic bombs dropped on Japan  
"busy shoving mud....busy humans" could refer to race riots or soldiers in WWII or Vietnam

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

The poem continually personifies jazz as the voice of reason, or the healer of men: "Some secret jazz/Shouted, *wait, don't go,*" "they were shocked at the sound of life," in bad times they "hear a familiar sound,/Jazz...And listen,/And feel, & die."

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?

The poem juxtaposes positive images about jazz with negative images of people and life: "Laughing blobs of blood & faith,"  
Words/phrases like "dying," "killing," "raping," "blood soaked," "death dreams" all make the reader feel negative emotions.

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

Call and response/Break: the italicized lines are like a conversation between people in the poem  
Groove: punctuation creates pauses and changes the rhythm of lines: "So we learned to cry, pleased," "Hearing her screams, laughing  
lists of -ing words that change the rhythm: "whisting, thinking, singing, beating, swinging"  
Riff: repeated "it" phrases: "wept for it, hugged it, kissed it, loved it, joined it"

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.

The poet wants his audience to see how awful people and the world are, and how jazz can erase the inhumanity and make people feel again.

6. What did you learn from reading this poem?