

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

1. Rodriguez grew up impoverished and a victim of racial prejudice and oppression
2. Rodriguez activism and teaching has brought him into close contact with "this country;" he has seen all of the suffering he refers to in 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?

President Clinton used the word "change" more than 60 times in his inaugural speech, so it is understandable that Rodriguez points out all the things that need change.
Issues of poverty, disillusionment, race hatred, class privilege, etc. that exist in the 90s

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

The writer refers to "race hatred"
The writer says the country "dances without a beat;" the beat is central to jazz music, and in many song lyrics and poems, becomes a metaphor for life itself.

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?

There are many negative words/phrases: "tattered," "blurry eyed," "inebriated," "ocean of lies," "seethes," "stretched," "Fury & Fire."
The poet wants the new President to see the problems of America.

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

Riff: each image begins with "this country" and reinforces the regular rhythm of the poem
Call and response: the audience would be compelled to join in on "this country"

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.

After pointing out all of the problems in America, the poet ends with an ominous image of angry people "waiting/At the corner of Fury & Fire", and implies there will be a response to all of the suffering and injustice.

6. What did you learn from reading this poem?