

Jazz Lyrics/Poetry Analysis
Annotated analysis (discussion starters)

Title Between the World and Me

Writer Richard Wright

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

1. Wright grew up impoverished and a victim of racial prejudice and oppression under Jim Crow
2. Wright was part of the Great Migration

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?

Jim Crow, tar and feathering, lynching (and the gruesome "party" atmosphere surrounding them; "butt-ends of cigars and cigarettes, peanut shells, a/drained gin-flask, and a whore's lipstick")

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

Lynching during the early part of the century was common
This is a protest poem, and jazz was often protest music

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: "charred stump," "black blood," "raw flesh," "boiling my limbs,"
"begging," "dry bones," "stony skull."
The poet wants the audience to feel the pain of the lynching victim.

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

Polyphony: the speaker's voice becomes the victim's voice telling his own story
Riff: Lines beginning with the same words creates a rhythm or groove: there was...the...and...

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 not only wants the reader to feel the agony of the victim, but to understand that the fear becomes the fear of all black people, like when "the ground gripped [his] feet and [his] heart

6. What did you learn from reading this poem?
