

Song Lyrics/Poetry Analysis
Annotated Analysis (discussion starters)

Title ___ *"The Backlash Blues"* _____
Writer ___ *"Langston Hughes"* _____

First, read the writer's biography. List two details that might have influenced the writing or your understanding of the song/poem.

1. ___ *wanted his work to "encompass...the essence of the black experience"* _____
2. ___ *wanted his work to show the "beating pulse of urbanized black life...[and the]common sorrows, struggles, and triumphs" of African Americans*

As you read the song/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 song/poem, answer the following questions, quoting parts of the lyrics or poem that led to your responses:

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

___ *Vietnam draft "send my son to Vietnam,"* _____
___ *Segregated housing policies/actions = segregated neighborhood schools. "Second class schools"* _____

2. How does this song/ poem relate to African American issues? Refer to the historical context and text of the song/poem.

___ *Segregated neighborhoods- redlining, covenants and restrictions, terrorism —"second class houses"*
___ *Poor Schools—"Second class schools"*
___ *hate strikes, job discrimination - when I try to find a job/...All you got to offer/Is a white backlash."*
___ *diversity of humanity – "Great big world. And it's full of folks like me who are Black, Yellow, Beige and Brown"*

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?

___ *"backlash," "fools," "second class," —all are negative; the audience feels African American frustration*
___ *"You're the one/ will have the blues"—perhaps a threatening tone warning the white audience?*

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

___ *Call and response—questions to elicit audience response* _____
___ *repetition—"Mr. Backlash"—draws attention and personifies the idea of the "white response" to race issues*

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

___ *The writer is reminding the audience of the wrongs against African Americans, and warning that those who continue will "have the blues"*

6. What did you learn by analyzing this poem or song?