

Song Lyrics/Poetry Analysis
Annotated analysis (discussion-starters)

Title__ *"Ball of Confusion (That's What the World Is Today)"*
Writers__ *Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong*

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

1. __ *Whitfield, African American, Harlem-born, raised in Detroit, Composer and Producer of The Temptations' psychedelic era, songs reflected black issues and growing militancy*
2. __ *Strong, Motown songwriter and lyricist, Whitfield collaborator*

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 song/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 song/ poem that led to your responses:

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

__ *1960's "white flight" and Black migration to Detroit jobs and/or better neighborhoods—"people moving out, people moving in", Detroit Riot in 1967, Riots following assassination of Dr. King*

__ *Fight for civil rights in northern cities, riots in northern cities, blacks more likely to Vietnam War due to the draft*

__ *Martin Luther King, Jr. "the only person talking about love thy brother is the preacher" was assassinated in 1968*

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

__ *The lyrics say the "color of their skin" is why people are people are moving in or moving out—refers to racial tension, white flight and segregation in northern cities like Detroit.*

__ *"An eye for an eye" alludes to violence going on daily and "the cities ablaze in the summertime" especially during the riots of 1967 in Detroit and after the assassination of Dr. King in 1968*

__ *"Vote for me and I'll set you free" could refer to white politicians courting the black vote. Coleman Young, first black mayor of Detroit, elected in 1973*

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?

__ *humiliation, aggravation, revolution, confusion—negative—writer wants reader to understand the confusion African Americans felt during these turbulent times*

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

__ *Rhythm—"people moving in, people moving out" "the beat goes on" _____*

__ *repetition—"run, run, run" "Rap on, brother, rap on" emphasize the idea and encourage audience involvement*

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

__ *The lyrics ask the audience to take a good look at the race issues like segregation, violence and poor education, and to start thinking about change (evolution) and/or revolution. _____*

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