

Song Lyrics/Poetry Analysis
Annotated analysis (discussion starters)

Title Black Panther
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. He wanted his work to "encompass...the essence of the black experience" _____
2. He 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 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?

Black Panther Leadership and its Ten Point Program—"The Panther"
"hobnailed boot"—refers to the rustic work shoes of many blacks, especially from the rural South

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

being "pushed into the corner" by segregation, violence, and oppression
"Eye for eye"—reference to violence—retaliation against violence perpetrated on and by African Americans
"truest/Of the oldest/Lies"—the phrase "old lie" usually refers to the assumption of racial inferiority

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?

"die," "lies," "desperate boldness," "Eye for eye," all have negative connotations. The writer wants the reader to understand the frustration and angst that members of the Black Panther Organization feel

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

repetition—"Pushed into..." reinforces the idea of oppression
Call and response—"I-don't-want-to-die cry" "I don't want to study war no more"—expected to elicit response

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 wants the audience to recognize the reasons for the "desperate boldness" of the Black Panthers, and perhaps understand them better.

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