

E-Content

American Literature

Semester: III

Lecture 14

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Lecture 14: Critical Discussion on Langston Hughes: 'Dream Deferred'

What kind of dream are we talking about here? The dreams we all experience whilst sleeping? Daydreaming? Most definitely not, this dream has to do with conscious goals, hopes and aims for the future.

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The speaker is suggesting that this dream is already delayed and frustrated and that time is of the essence - this dream has to be fulfilled or else.

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The poem does not offer any solution to the problem of the postponed dream. It merely puts before us some tentative examples. Something happens but the speaker isn't quite certain what.

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The reader is offered a series of comparisons. The dream is like:

- a raisin in the sun - a fruit which was once juicy, a nutritious food, now is seen to dry up and become useless. As the sun rises each day, time passes, nothing happens.
- like a sore - a flesh wound or symptom of illness which, once neglected, begins to turn bad and could be harmful to the health. Too late for a bandage or cream?

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- a syrupy sweet - sugar brings energy and life but this has been out too long and gone crusty. That dream was sweet once upon a time.
- a heavy load - who wants to carry such weight unnecessarily? Everyone has baggage but doesn't history show some people have always carried more than others?

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So these five contrasting elements help shape the poem and bring strong visual energy into the mind of the reader.

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The fact that food is prominent brings home the idea that this dream has to do with survival (of the fittest); what is taken in to the physical body is important but in the end a dream deferred can result in explosive consequences. Because it's like a ticking time-bomb?

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The final line metaphorically sums up the whole notion of what can happen when an individual's or a people's dream fails to manifest in real time. Oppression, societal pressure, prejudice and historical baggage and other factors can play their part in denying the dream.

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Critical Reading of the Poem:

Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--
And then run?

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Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

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Reference Page

http://mrsjohnsonenglish1.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/0/5/13053075/magery_poems_worksheet.pdf

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