

COMMON CORE FOCUS

RL 5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact. RL 9 Demonstrate knowledge of early-twentieth-century works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

ABOUT THE POETS

James Weldon Johnson After students read about Johnson, note the poet's restlessness and his work in New York. Then point out the title "My City." Ask what *My* suggests about New York's effect on the poet. **Possible answer:** *The city has captured Johnson's restless spirit.*

Claude McKay After students read about McKay, explain that the title "If We Must Die" suggests the need to commit fully to a cause. Link this idea to Churchill's interest in the poem, clarifying that Britain faced attack by the Nazis and needed people's full commitment to resistance.

NOTABLE QUOTE

"The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art." —James Weldon Johnson

"If a man is not faithful to his own individuality, he cannot be loyal to anything." —Claude McKay

Selection Resources

See resources on the Teacher One Stop DVD-ROM and on thinkcentral.com.

RESOURCE MANAGER UNIT 5

Plan and Teach, pp. 23–30
Text Analysis and Reading Skill, pp. 31–34†

DIAGNOSTIC AND SELECTION TESTS

Selection Tests, pp. 225–228

BEST PRACTICES TOOLKIT

TECHNOLOGY

- Teacher One Stop DVD-ROM
- Student One Stop DVD-ROM
- Audio Anthology CD
- ExamView Test Generator on the Teacher One Stop

The Harlem Renaissance

My City

Poem by James Weldon Johnson

If We Must Die

Poem by Claude McKay

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Meet the Authors

James Weldon Johnson

1871–1938



A leading light of the Harlem Renaissance, James Weldon Johnson was also a lawyer, teacher, songwriter, diplomat, and civil rights activist. He dedicated his life to fighting prejudice and inspiring African Americans to new heights of social and literary achievement.

Unstoppable Talent After graduating from Atlanta University in 1894, Johnson worked as a school principal, founded a daily newspaper, and became the first African-American lawyer since Reconstruction to be admitted to the Florida bar. In 1901, the restless Johnson traveled to New York, where he and

his younger brother became successful Broadway songwriters. One of their early songs, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," eventually became known as the African American national anthem.

Renaissance Man Johnson also published works in many genres of literature. Among his best-known works are his novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, his poetry collection *God's Trombones*, and a cultural history *Black Manhattan*. He also edited several groundbreaking collections of African American poetry and spirituals.

Claude McKay

c. 1890–1948



Hailed by James Weldon Johnson as "the poet of rebellion," Jamaican-born Festus Claudius McKay made his name as a fierce critic of racism in the United States. His poetry collection *Harlem Shadows*, published in 1922, is considered one of the founding works of the Harlem Renaissance.

Poet of Rebellion Already established as a poet, 23-year-old McKay arrived in the United States in 1912. In 1919, the country was torn apart by a wave of violent attacks against African Americans. Racial tensions erupted into 26 riots across the country during a period known as the Red Summer.

"If We Must Die" was McKay's anguished response, which became instantly popular among African Americans.

Enduring Message During World War II, the poem took on new meaning when British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill quoted from it during a speech. The poem went on to become a battle cry for the Allies in their fight against the Nazis. McKay often complained that the fame of this one poem had overshadowed his other work, which included the novels *Home to Harlem* and *Banana Bottom*.

Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HJWJ

ANALYSIS: SONNET

Some ideas help keep poetic traditions alive. The centuries-old sonnet, a 14-line lyric poem with specific patterns of rhythm and rhyme, has been reimagined by many poets. The poems in this lesson are based on two classic types of sonnets.

The Italian, or Petrarchan, sonnet is divided into two sections: an octave, or eight-line grouping, and a sestet, or six-line grouping. The usual rhyme scheme for the octave is *abbaabba*. The rhyme scheme for the sestet varies but is often *cddcde* or *cdccdc*.

The English, or Shakespearean, sonnet has a rhyme scheme of *abab cdcd efef gg*. This divides the poem into four distinct line groups: three quatrains, or four-line units, followed by a couplet, a pair of rhymed lines.

Sonnets are often written in iambic pentameter. In this meter, each line includes five pairs of syllables, the first unstressed, the second stressed. However, modern poets often break the rules when writing sonnets. As you read, note how each poet adapts the sonnet's structure to fit a modern message.

READING SKILL: UNDERSTAND FORM AND MEANING

Understanding a sonnet's structure can help you interpret its meaning. Keep in mind the following:

• In many sonnets, quatrains, octaves, and other line groupings are not set apart by stanza breaks. Use the rhyme scheme to determine the poem's line groupings.

• Each line grouping usually expresses one main idea.

• The first line grouping of the sonnet describes the speaker's situation or problem. The last line grouping resolves, concludes, or reacts to that situation.

As you begin to read each sonnet, identify the line groupings, listing them in a chart like the one shown. Also record in your chart the main idea expressed in each line grouping.

Line Grouping	Main Idea
1–4	
5–8	
9–12	
13–14	

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

When does old become NEW again?

When CDs came on the market, vinyl records seemed doomed. Then, hip-hop artists made the scratching of a needle on vinyl the signature sound of a new style of music. Artists often bring back old ideas to give them new meaning. Poets James Weldon Johnson and Claude McKay did just that with their revival of the sonnet, breathing new life into a 700-year-old poetic form.

PRESENT Think of an artist, a musician, or a writer from the past whose work you admire. Create a plan to adapt this person's work to make a creation of your own, and present your plan to the class.



Teach

When does old become NEW again?

After students read about Johnson and McKay writing sonnets, ask them to think of music, fashions, or slang that were popular, fell from use, and have made recent reappearances in popular culture as they complete the **PRESENT** activity.

TEXT ANALYSIS

COMMON CORE RL 5

Model the Skill: SONNET

Help students identify iambic pentameter by writing this line on the board and reading it aloud:

I rise and greet the shades of fading night

Point out that in each of the line's five pairs of syllables, the first is stressed and the second is unstressed: *ī rīse / and greet / the shades / ōf fād / īng night*.

GUIDED PRACTICE Ask students to explain the difference between the Italian, or Petrarchan, sonnet, and the English, or Shakespearean, sonnet.

READING SKILL

COMMON CORE RL 5

Model the Skill: UNDERSTAND FORM AND MEANING

Help students determine a sonnet's line groupings by using its rhyme scheme. Place the letter *a* at the end of the first line of one of the sonnets. Then place an *a* at the end of any other line whose end word rhymes with the end word in the first line. Ask students to assign the letter *b* to the next end word that does not rhyme with the first, and so on.

GUIDED PRACTICE Have students identify the rhyme scheme of another poem the class has read.

RESOURCE MANAGER—Copy Master Understand Form and Meaning p. 33 (for student use while reading the selections)

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

FOR STRUGGLING READERS

- **metrical support**, "measured, patterned arrangement of syllables"
- **rhyme**, "regular recurrence of corresponding sounds"
- **rhyme scheme**, "pattern of rhymes"
- **stressed**, "regular recurrence of grouped stressed and unstressed, long and short, or high-pitched and low-pitched syllables"

- **stanza**, "group of versed lines forming the divisions of poetry"
- **stressed**, "relative force or loudness with which a syllable is uttered"
- **syllable**, "word or word part pronounced with a single, uninterrupted sounding of voice"
- **unstressed**, "relative softness with which a syllable is uttered"

SUMMARY

In this poem, the speaker considers what he will miss when he dies and decides he will miss his home—Manhattan—most of all.

READ WITH A PURPOSE

Help students set a purpose for reading. Tell them to read to discover what the poets dread most when contemplating death.

READING SKILL

Model the Skill: FORM AND MEANING

Point out that students can use stanza breaks to identify and interpret line groupings. Tell students that in this sonnet, the stanza break separates the first eight lines, called the octave, from the last six, called the sestet. In the octave, the speaker contemplates death and names several aspects of nature he will not miss. Ask students to identify the main idea of the sestet. **Possible answer:** The speaker will miss everything about Manhattan.

TEXT ANALYSIS

Model the Skill: SONNET

Tell students that the sonnet's line groupings determine its type. Point out that a sonnet containing an octave and sestet is a Petrarchan sonnet. An English, or Shakespearean, sonnet has three quatrains and a couplet. **Answer:** Petrarchan

Extend the Discussion What relationship exists between the main ideas in the two line groupings?

REVISIT THE BIG QUESTION

When does old become new again?

Discuss How does Johnson's revival of a form often associated with love poetry support the message of "My City"? **Possible answer:** "My City" is a poem expressing the poet's love for his city. Its subject is well suited to the form.

My City

James Weldon Johnson

When I come down to sleep death's endless night,
The threshold of the unknown dark to cross,
What to me then will be the keenest loss,
When this bright world blurs on my fading sight?
Will it be that no more I shall see the trees
Or smell the flowers or hear the singing birds
Or watch the flashing streams or patient herds?
No, I am sure it will be none of these. **A**

But, ah! Manhattan's sights and sounds, her smells,
Her crowds, her throbbing force, the thrill that comes
From being of her a part, her subtle spells,
Her shining towers, her avenues, her slums—
O God! the stark, unutterable pity,
To be dead, and never again behold my city! **B**

Analyze Visuals
What details in this photograph correspond to the poet's vision of his city?

A FORM AND MEANING
Use the stanza break to identify the line groupings of this poem. What is the main idea of lines 1–8?

B SONNET
Judging from its line groupings, what type of sonnet is this?

View of Broadway near Times Square in Manhattan, 1920s



TIERED DISCUSSION PROMPTS

In lines 9–14, these prompts to help students understand the urban vitality that characterized the Harlem Renaissance:

Connect Think about life in big cities. What is it like? *Accept all thoughtful responses.*

Analyze How does the speaker personify the city? **Possible answer:** The speaker personifies the city as a vital, magical woman who possesses a shining exterior as well as a dark side.

Evaluate Is the speaker's description of Manhattan appealing? Explain. **Possible answer:** The speaker's description is appealing because of its sensual quality and because it conveys a strong love of the city.

Analyze Visuals

Possible answer: The background of the photograph shows the "shining towers" Johnson mentions in line 12, while the foreground shows two broad avenues that might be said to cast "subtle spells" through enticing advertisements and theatre marquees.

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Vocabulary Support Have students work in mixed-ability pairs to determine the meaning of such phrases as "death's endless night," "threshold of the unknown dark," "keenest loss" (lines 1–3). Have students put these phrases into their own words to paraphrase lines 1–3. Have them continue until they have paraphrased the whole poem. Have volunteers read their versions of the poem to the class.

FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS/AP

Analyze Point out to students that the "I" present in lines 1, 5, and 8 is absent from lines 9–14, the lines in which the speaker describes the city. How does the absence of the "I" emphasize the power that the poet ascribes to Manhattan? Have students discuss this question and present their conclusions to the class.

FOR STRUGGLING READERS

Options for Reading: Audio Recording Have students listen to the poems on the English Anthology CD (also recommended for English learners) while they read along in their texts. Ask students to notice the main ideas, rhyme, and line groupings in each poem.

For "My City," students will need help with syntax and figurative language to unlock main ideas. Listen to line 2 several times; then help students unravel inverted syntax there and elsewhere. Use line 11 to model using context clues to build meaning for figurative language.