

## Learning Targets

- Analyze the use of imagery in a poem to see how it refers to the experience of being an American.
- Explain how a particular iconic American image has historical significance.

## Before Reading

1. Poets and writers will often use **imagery** that evokes specific times, places or events in history to create a specific feeling or reaction. Photographers also look for images that evoke specific emotional reactions from their audience.

## During Reading

2. Highlight places where Hughes uses imagery to evoke American history.

**LEARNING STRATEGIES:**  
Sketching, TP-CASTT

### Literary Terms

**Imagery** is the descriptive language authors use to create word pictures. Writers create imagery through words and details that appeal to one or more of the five senses.

## Poetry

# Let America Be America Again

by Langston Hughes

Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

5 (America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—  
Let it be that great strong land of love  
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme  
That any man be crushed by one above.

10 (It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty  
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
But opportunity is real, and life is free,  
Equality is in the air we breathe.

15 (There's never been equality for me,  
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")  
*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?*

## My Notes

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### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Each of the first quatrains uses an image to evoke the dream of America. What images does Hughes use to evoke the promise and possibilities of America?

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# Researching Images of America

## My Notes

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### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Generate a list of types of people represented in the poem by those who are “mumb[ing] in the dark.” What do the groups have in common?

### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

The two voices introduced early in this poem represent two conflicting themes. Hughes wants us to see that these themes inhabit the American sense of who we are. What are the two contrasting points of view, and how are they developed in the poem?

### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

According to the poem, who has not enjoyed freedom in America?

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*And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,

20 I am the Negro bearing slavery’s scars.

I am the red man driven from the land,

I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—

And finding only the same old stupid plan

Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

25 I am the young man, full of strength and hope,

Tangled in that ancient endless chain

Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!

Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!

Of work the men! Of take the pay!

30 Of owning everything for one’s own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman<sup>1</sup> to the soil.

I am the worker sold to the machine.

I am the Negro, servant to you all.

I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—

35 Hungry yet today despite the dream.

Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!

I am the man who never got ahead,

The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I’m the one who dreamt our basic dream

40 In the Old World while still a serf of kings,

Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,

That even yet its mighty daring sings

In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned

That’s made America the land it has become.

45 O, I’m the man who sailed those early seas

In search of what I meant to be my home—

For I’m the one who left dark Ireland’s shore,

And Poland’s plain, and England’s grassy lea,

And torn from Black Africa’s strand I came

50 To build a “homeland of the free.”

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?

Surely not me? The millions on relief today?

<sup>1</sup> **bondsman** (*n.*): serf or slave

- The millions shot down when we strike?
- 55 The millions who have nothing for our pay?  
For all the dreams we've dreamed  
And all the songs we've sung  
And all the hopes we've held  
And all the flags we've hung,
- 60 The millions who have nothing for our pay—  
Except the dream that's almost dead today.
- O, let America be America again—  
The land that never has been yet—  
And yet must be—the land where *every* man is free.
- 65 The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME—  
Who made America,  
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,  
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,  
Must bring back our mighty dream again.
- 70 Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—  
The steel of freedom does not stain.  
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,  
We must take back our land again,  
America!
- 75 O, yes,  
I say it plain,  
America never was America to me,  
And yet I swear this oath—  
America will be!
- 80 Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,  
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,  
We, the people, must redeem<sup>2</sup>  
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.  
The mountains and the endless plain—
- 85 All, all the stretch of these great green states—  
And make America again!

## My Notes

## KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

How does the tone change by the end of the poem?  
Has the speaker given up on the promise of America?

<sup>2</sup> **redeem** (v.): release, liberate, rescue, save

# Researching Images of America

## WORD CONNECTIONS

### Word Meanings

*Iconic* means to be famous and well-known—and believed to represent a particular idea. The Statue of Liberty is an iconic image.

### My Notes

## After Reading

3. What was the most powerful image to you as a reader? What made it powerful to you? What point was Hughes trying to make by using the image?

## Researching an Iconic Image

Some images have become a part of the story of the United States of America. Photographs from an event or of a person often capture some of the essence of what it is to be an American. What makes some images more iconic than the rest is the impact they have on the person viewing the image. There is a point at which an image has a strong enough impact that it becomes a part of our national story and collective memory.

Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites define the term **iconic image** in their article, *Performing Civic Identity: the Iconic Photograph of the Flag Raising on Iwo Jima*: “Iconic photographs are widely recognized as representations of significant historical events, activate strong emotional response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics.”



4. Explain the strong emotional response that this image activates. What makes it an iconic American image?

5. Revisit your vocabulary word tree and add details to your working definition of what it means to be an American.



# Researching Images of America

## My Notes

### Selecting a Topic

7. Select one or two items on your list and expand your thinking with some notes on what you already know about the topic. Questions to consider as you think about your topics: How is this topic historically relevant for most Americans? What key words are associated with this topic?

Select one topic as the subject of your gallery submission and begin your research.

### Researching Your Image

8. There are pictures everywhere on the Internet, in print media, and in history books. Where will you find the most useful information? Use the ideas and the key words that you generated to guide your review of reliable sources. Print a copy of your iconic image and create a plaque with a description, title, and photographic credit.

Your image:

When it was created:

Why it is iconic:

### Presenting Your Image

After your and your classmates' images and descriptions have all been added to the Gallery of America, prepare a brief presentation of your image for your peers. This presentation should introduce the image, provide some background knowledge, and explain the significance of the image.

In pairs, go through the exhibit listening to each presenter's brief explanation of his or her iconic image. After you have seen and heard all of the presentations, add additional thoughts and details to your vocabulary tree for defining the term "American." Review the presentations that you have seen, and select the two images you would add to the permanent exhibit of iconic American images. Write your choices and the reasons for your selection on a feedback card.

### Check Your Understanding

**Writing Prompt:** Compose an essay explaining the iconic image you researched and why you chose it. Your essay should provide some background information and illustrate or explain how your image is iconic, using the three elements of an iconic image as guidelines for your thinking. Be sure to:

- Introduce your image with a thesis that provides a clear purpose for your explanation.
- Provide background information that demonstrates that this topic is historically significant.
- Cite your sources using the MLA format.