

## As I Grew Older:

### Literary terms: symbols

#### 1) What does the wall represent and what is the poet's dream?

In Langston Hughes' poem "*As I Grew Older*," the dream symbolizes the poet's hopes for a better life, equality, and freedom for African Americans. The wall represents the barriers of racism and segregation (specifically the Jim Crow laws that blocked these dreams from the late 19th century until the Civil Rights Act of 1964).

### Literary terms: theme, message

#### 2) What is the theme and message of the poem?

The theme of the poem is the negative effects of racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Hughes conveys a powerful message: he believes one must struggle in order to overcome any obstacle one might encounter and realize one's dream.

## Thinking Strategy: Different Perspectives

**3) Is the poet optimistic or pessimistic? Relate to 3 different time frames.**

When the poet was a **child**, his dream was clear to him, "bright like a sun." He knew exactly what he wanted to become: "it was in front of me." We can infer that he was optimistic and joyful, as the dream was bright.

As an **adolescent**, he almost forgot his dream since he had gone through many obstacles. As he grew older, he was faced with "a wall" that rose slowly. We can assume that, as a teenager, he encountered firsthand incidents of racism and prejudice. As a result, he lived in despair and was very pessimistic: "rose until it touched the sky." We can infer that he was depressed: "I lie down in the shadow."

However, as an **adult**, at the end of the poem, he is optimistic again and calls for action to change reality. He believes it is possible to make a change and relies on himself to do so.

## Literary terms: symbols

**4) What do hands represent in the poem?**

Hands are used to break and build things. The poet wants to use his hands to break the "wall." He wants to raise awareness of the consequences of the discrimination and segregation that African Americans had to endure.

Using his words, the poet hopes to break this "wall" and reach equality. He wants to use his hands—writing poems and stories (literature)—as a way to raise awareness. He aims to change society's attitudes and prejudices through his art. He hopes to inspire himself and others in his community to achieve their dreams and live in a society without racial segregation.

## Thinking Strategy: Compare & Contrast

### 1) Compare between George and Mr. Cattanzara.

Both characters are poor and live in the same neighborhood. They both read newspapers, **but** Mr. Cattanzara reads the New York Times, which is for educated people, **while** George reads newspapers for common readers. Mr. Cattanzara drinks to escape from life, **while** George locks himself in his room. Their last names have symbolic meanings: Cattanzara means "chained" (he is chained to his meaningless life), and Stoyonovich means "stands still" (George can move forward or become like Mr. Cattanzara).

There are some differences between them. Mr. Cattanzara is much **older than** 19-year-old George. Both are underachievers, **but** Mr. Cattanzara works as a change maker, while George has dropped out of school and has no job. Mr. Cattanzara has only his sick wife, while George has a father and a sister.

At this point, Mr. Cattanzara cannot change his life, but George is young and has his whole life ahead of him. Mr. Cattanzara gave up on his potential and has lost hope for a better life. **In contrast**, George still dreams of a better future and takes the first step to improve his life at the end of the story.

## Thinking Strategy: Cause & Effect

### 2) What were the effects of George's lie?

**In the short term**, George's life improved. People in the neighborhood started to smile kindly at him and respect him. Additionally, Sophie was kind to him and gave him a dollar a week. George was in a good mood and enjoyed life more. He went to the movies and felt no need to go to the park at night.

However, there were also long-term negative effects. After a few

weeks, he started to feel uneasy and avoided Mr. C for fear of being discovered. Once the lie was discovered, it caused him great embarrassment. He wanted to impress Mr. C but ended up feeling that he had lost his respect.

He also lost Sophie's respect and allowance, and he felt stressed and afraid to leave his room or house. Another possible long-term effect was the start of George's education. After staying in his room for a week, he couldn't take it anymore, went to the library, and started to read.

### Thinking Strategy: Explaining Patterns

#### 3) Describe George's pattern of behavior.

George's pattern of behavior is to quit and blames others whenever he faces difficulties. George quit school on an impulse at the age of 16. Since then, he tried to go to a summer school, but he didn't like that idea because the kids were younger than him. He also considered registering in a night high school, but he didn't like that idea because he didn't like teacher telling him what to do. George does not realize that in order to achieve his dream of a nice house and a well-paid job, he needs to have education. Therefore, he must overcome his impulsiveness and lack of motivation to do the things he needs to do, so people will respect him.

However, George breaks his pattern of behavior and starts reading the books. While we cannot be certain that George will finish the books, we do know that George has taken the first step by taking action and assuming responsibility.

### Literary terms: setting

#### 4. What is the setting of the story?

The setting of the story “A summer's reading” is in New York sometimes between the years 1930 - 1941 which is also the great depression the story takes place in a poor neighborhood which is hot and stony which means that there were no trees near the neighborhood.

#### Thinking Strategy: Compare & Contrast

#### 5. Describe a character from your life that is similar to Mr. Cattanzara. Compare and contrast him/her

Mr. Cattanzara, George's neighbor, is more intelligent than most people in his neighborhood, as he reads the *New York Times*. Even though he is married, he seems unhappy with his life. We can tell this because he sometimes drinks too much, probably to escape his problems.

A person from my life who reminds me of Mr. Cattanzara is \_\_\_\_\_. Both are smart and work in jobs they don't enjoy. However, they deal with their unhappiness in different ways. Mr. Cattanzara drinks to escape his problems, while \_\_\_\_\_ quit their job to try something new.

Another similarity is that they both care about others and try to make a positive difference. Mr. Cattanzara shows interest in George's life. He cares about George's future. He asks him

questions and helps him understand that he needs to work on improving his life. By doing this, Mr. Cattanzara inspires George to make a change. In the same way, \_\_\_\_\_ takes an interest in my life. He encourages me and talks to me often in order to help me overcome difficulties in my life.

### Thinking Strategy: Different Perspectives

#### 6. Explain the two aspects of Mr. Cattanzara's job?

Mr. Cattanzara is a change maker. First, he works in a change booth in the subway and literally gives people change for their money. Another aspect of his job is that he is a change maker in the life of the main character George, by pushing him to read 100 books Mr. C helps George pick up his education and by that helps him take responsibility and make a change in his life.

### Thinking Strategy: Different Perspectives

#### 7. What is Sophie's reaction to George's lie and what is Mr. Cattanzara's?

When Sophie finds out that George lied to her, she gets mad and become upset. She shouts at him and angrily takes away his allowance claiming he's not worth her hard work.

Later, when George refuses to leave the house out of embarrassment, she begs him to get out of his room.

Mr. Cattanzara takes a different approach; instead of punishing George by exposing his lie, he spreads a rumor that George has finished reading the 100 books. He uses reverse psychology, which eventually motivates George to read the books and get educated.

## **Bridging**

**What is the theme of the poem "As I grew older"?**

**Describe/Compare an event from your life or from a book/movie which presents the same theme.**

The theme of the poem is the negative effects of racism, prejudice, and discrimination. A book I have read recently deals with the same theme.

**It is similar to** the poem in the way it explores racism, and the social effects on people's lives.

The book is about two sisters who are black but can pass as white and each sister chooses to live her life differently- one as black and one as white.

As their paths split the readers can see the influences of the decision on each of the girls' lives.

**Like the poem,** it describes the desperate and overwhelming reality of black people and goes into the problem of racism.

**In contrast,** the poet suggests a happy ending that gives us hope and the positive lesson of not giving up whereas the book is a simple

exploration and criticism of society without a particularly happy ending or a positive message for the crowd.