

## Practice and Apply

### SUMMARY

Drawing on the rhythms of 1940s bebop jazz, this poem expresses the festering tension felt by African Americans unable to realize their dreams.

#### READING SKILL

##### A RHYTHM AND REPETITION

**Answers:** *Stress pattern:* RAIsin / FEster / ROTten / SUGar / SYRupy; *words emphasized:* dry / raisin, sun / fester, sore / then run / does, stink, rotten, meat / crust, sugar / syrupy, sweet

**Extend the Discussion** Describe the rhythm and the feelings it evokes. If you marked the lines differently, explain your variation. **Possible answer:** The rhythm is disjointed as well as fast and abrupt. This rhythm evokes feelings of tension, dissatisfaction, anger, or anxiety. Students with different line markings should be able to explain what they hear.

### ANSWERS

- Possible answer:** A dream deferred is one that remains unrealized. In this case, the speaker may mean the promise of social equality.
- Possible answer:** The poem's last line hints at an outbreak of violence.
- Possible answer: Similes:** "like a raisin in the sun" (line 3), "like a sore" (line 4), "like rotten meat" (line 6), "like a syrupy sweet" (line 8), "like a heavy load" (line 10). The similes may reveal the speaker's bitterness or disgust toward the current social situation and the endless delays in improving it.

## Harlem

Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
5 And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet? **A**

Maybe it just sags  
10 like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

#### ANALYZE VISUALS

What elements of this painting help capture the thriving street life in Harlem?

##### A RHYTHM AND REPETITION

Identify the pattern of stresses in lines 2–8. Which words are emphasized by this rhythm?

### Literary Analysis

- Clarify** What does the speaker mean by "a dream deferred"?
- Make Inferences** What social or political consequences are hinted at in the poem's last line?
- Interpret Figurative Language** List the similes the speaker uses to describe the effect of a deferred dream. What do these comparisons reveal about the speaker's attitude?

*Street Shadows* (1959), Jacob Lawrence. Egg tempera on hardboard, 24" × 30". Private collection, New York. Photograph courtesy of Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence/Art Resource, New York. © 2007, The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

840 UNIT 5: THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE AND MODERNISM

### DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

For general guidelines on differentiating instruction, see



**BEST PRACTICES TOOLKIT**

Differentiated Instruction pp. 31–38

#### FOR LESS-PROFICIENT READERS

##### Options for Reading: Read Aloud

- Have students read along in their texts as you read the poem aloud. Ask students to notice rhythm and repetition in each poem.

- For "The Weary Blues," point out to students that the word *syncopated* in the first line concerns rhythm. Help students to notice that the poem contains long flowing lines, short emphatic lines, and repetition, all of which contribute to the poem's rhythm.



**BEST PRACTICES TOOLKIT—Transparency**

Read Aloud/Think Aloud p. A34



Lines 1–11

### DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Use these prompts to help students understand the effect of deferred dreams:

**Connect** Describe a dream or goal that you have that has not yet been realized. How do you feel about the situation and why? *Accept all thoughtful responses.*

**Interpret** What is the poem's main message or theme? **Possible answer:** *If dreams are denied, serious or even violent consequences can happen.*

**Evaluate** Do you agree or disagree with the speaker's opinion regarding the impact of deferred dreams? Explain. *Students may agree by citing examples regarding the destructive effects of dreams that are lost or postponed. Others may say that deferred dreams inspire people to work harder.*

### ANALYZE VISUALS

**Possible answer:** *The thriving street life of Harlem is conveyed through Lawrence's use of color, shape, and composition. The warm reds, yellows, and oranges interact with the cool blues, suggesting motion and energy. Both the windows in the background and the street in the foreground are crowded, suggesting an active community life.*

**About the Art** American artist Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000) loved to paint the neighborhoods and streets of New York City. As Langston Hughes invites readers into the African-American experience with his words, Jacob Lawrence invites viewers to participate in its movement, sound, and liveliness.

#### FOR LESS-PROFICIENT READERS

**Concept Support: Rhythm** [paired option] Explain that “Harlem” draws on the rhythm of 1940s bebop jazz. Traditional jazz often includes syncopation, rhythm accents, and improvisation. Bebop jazz moves beyond these, speeding up the pace of rhythmic change and including more complex melodies. Play some examples of bebop jazz for students and have pairs take turns reading “Harlem” aloud as the music plays.

#### FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS/AP

**Compare Literary Texts** Refer students back to the events that Frederick Douglass recounts in his *Narrative*, found on pages 538–547. Ask them to discuss the ways in which Douglass's triumph over Covey, an event that “rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom” (line 244), describes Hughes's prediction of what happens to a dream deferred.