

ELA: Grade 7, Lesson 17, Analyzing “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”

Lesson Focus: Analyze structure of a poem

Practice Focus: Read and analyze structure of “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”

Objective: Students will use “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” to engage with poetry with a focus on the structure.

Academic Vocabulary: the Congo, the Euphrates, the Mississippi, the Nile

TN Standards: 7.RL.KID.1, 7.RL.KID.2, 7.RL.CS.4, 7.RI.CS.5, 7.W.TTP.2, 7.W.PDW.4

Teacher Materials:

- The Teacher Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 17

Student Materials:

- Pencil, paper, surface to write on
- The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 17 which can be found on www.tn.gov/education

Teacher Do	Students Do
<p>Opening (1 min)</p> <p>Hello! Welcome to Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series for literacy! Today’s lesson is for all our 7th graders out there, though everyone is welcome to tune in. This lesson is the second in this week’s series.</p> <p>My name is ____ and I’m a ____ grade teacher in Tennessee schools. I’m so excited to be your teacher for this lesson! Welcome to my virtual classroom!</p> <p>If you didn’t see our previous lesson, you can find it at www.tn.gov/education. You can still tune in to today’s lesson if you haven’t seen any of our others. But it might be more fun if you first go back and watch our other lessons, since today we’ll be talking about things we learned previously.</p> <p>Today we will be learning about the structure of Langston Hughes’ poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”! Before we get started, to participate fully in our lesson today, you will need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pencil, paper, surface to write on• The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 17 which can be found on www.tn.gov/education <p>Ok, let’s begin!</p>	<p>Students gather materials for the lesson and prepare to engage with the lesson’s content.</p>
<p>Intro (5 min)</p> <p>Last time, we viewed images from Jacob Lawrence’s series of paintings about the Great Migration and read an informational text about the Harlem Renaissance. We learned the Great Migration was period of time in the mid-1910s to 1920s when many African Americans moved from</p>	<p>Students prepare to follow the gradual-release trajectory, understanding that they will be doing more listening at first and</p>

the south to northern cities for better life opportunities. The Harlem Renaissance was period that followed the Great Migration where there was tremendous growth in art, literature, and political thought among the African American community, centered in New York City. After the lesson we considered this question: [Show Slide 1.] How do the ideas in Lawrence's paintings of the Great Migration connect to the beliefs in the Harlem Renaissance?

To answer this question, you reviewed your notes from your note-catchers about the paintings and article. First, we had to be sure we understood the central ideas in Jacob Lawrence's paintings. One central idea we brainstormed in the lesson was that African Americans migrated to northern cities to pursue their dreams of a better future where they would have more opportunities, freedom, and equality. Then we had to look over our notes to determine what the key beliefs were in the Harlem Renaissance. Important groups and people in the Harlem Renaissance believed African Americans should no longer tolerate their poor treatment and should take action to change the status quo. Now, we have to put these ideas together. Notice in this example how the response directly connects the ideas in the painting to the beliefs of the Harlem Renaissance: [Show Slide 2.]

African Americans migrated to have a better life in the North and although some things were better, they were still not treated equally and fairly. So, during the Harlem Renaissance many leaders believed it was time for African Americans to be more vocal and politically active to change the status quo so they could finally live the dreams and ideas depicted in Lawrence's paintings.

Today our goal is to read and analyze how the structure and language of the poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," impacts the meaning of the poem. In case you didn't know, the word "Negro" is an old word that refers to African Americans. We will begin with me showing you what that looks like, and then there will be time for you to practice on your own with my support. Finally, I will assign you independent work you can complete after the video ends.

Let's get started! Close your eyes for a minute and picture a river that you've either visited yourself or have seen pictures of. As you do, try to hear what the river sounds like. Is the river quietly flowing, or is the river water smashing into rocks and making a sound? Now, watch the river. What does the

more "doing" toward the end of the lesson.

water look like as it's flowing? Is it moving quickly, or moving so slowly you can barely see the current? Next, try to picture where the river begins. Does it start as just a little creek in a little town? What about where it ends? What does that place look like? Does it finally flow into the ocean, a lake, or maybe it joins another river?

Great! You can open your eyes. There is something special about a river isn't there? It can be relaxing or scary. It can be slow and lazy or quick and exciting. No matter the river that you pictured, you connected to it in some way.

Langston Hughes was an African American writer during the Harlem Renaissance and is considered by many people to be one of America's great poets. He wrote the poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." The rivers he writes about are also very special, and each one, like most rivers, has a long history. Let's talk a little bit about the rivers Langston Hughes mentions in this poem before we read the poem.

[Show Slide 3.] I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

Here is a picture of the Euphrates River. So just by looking at the picture, where would you say the river is located? [Pause.]

Yes, I think it must run through a pretty dry area, like a desert. Look at all of the sand and dirt. The Euphrates River is located in Western Asia, but more importantly is one of the oldest and most important rivers in history. It runs through a part of the world known as the cradle of civilization. To give you some idea of its location here is a map. [Show Slide 4.]

[Show Slide 5.] Here is a picture of the Congo. Where do you think this one is located? [Pause.] Good, not in the desert. In fact, I'd say it's someplace in a forest. Let's look at a map. [Show Slide 6.] Awesome! If you guessed a jungle, instead of a forest you were correct. In fact the Congo runs through parts of the continent of Africa. It is the second longest river in Africa only behind [pause]...that's right our next river the Nile.

[Show Slide 7.] Do you remember what the Nile runs through? [Pause.] [Show Slide 8.] Yes! It runs through Egypt, and while Egypt is known for many things, what is one of the things that it is best known for? [Show Slide 9.] Awesome. The pyramids!

<p>Finally, the speaker talks about one of the most famous rivers in the United States.</p> <p>I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.</p> <p>[Show Slide 10.] I know some of you watching know about the Mississippi River because you live near it. You'll see on the map that the river actually runs through a small part of Tennessee. You can also see that it can be very pretty at times with the sunset, or it can get look kind of dirty because of the mud the river is so famous for.</p> <p>Great job everyone. So, now that we know a little about the rivers that are mentioned, we will read the poem to hear what Langston Hughes has to tell us about them.</p>	
<p>Teacher Model/Read-Aloud (15 min)</p> <p>To get ready, I'm going to make a note-catcher so I can keep track of my thoughts, and I'd like you to make this note-catcher on your paper, too, to jot down your thoughts about the poem. Make sure you draw it to fill the page, like this:</p> <p>[Show Slide 11.] [Pause.]</p> <p>As usual, I'm going to read the entire poem the first time without stopping. So, close your eyes again. This time, I want you to just listen and think about what you notice and how you feel. Ready? [Show Slide 12.]</p> <p>The Negro Speaks of Rivers BY <u>LANGSTON HUGHES</u></p> <p>I've known rivers: I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.</p> <p>My soul has grown deep like the rivers.</p> <p>I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young. I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep. I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it. I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.</p> <p>I've known rivers: Ancient, dusky rivers.</p>	<p>Students create a note-catcher to record their thoughts and quotes from the text.</p> <p>Students follow along, comprehending the text. They use teacher think-alouds and tips (e.g., definitions of words) to support their comprehension, and they think or write as directed in response to prompts and questions.</p>

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Wow, what an awesome poem right? Take a moment to jot what you noticed about the poem and how it made you feel.
[Pause.]

I notice the speaker discusses how he knows different rivers throughout history and there several stanzas of different lengths. I also see a few lines are indented in the middle. You know what? Those indented lines make the poem look like a river going back and forth. When I read the poem, I had a positive feeling, kind of like strength or importance. Like the river. I'll have to reread the poem very closely to see if this feeling is on the right track, or if I just imagined it. I'm going to jot some notes in my note-catcher. Under "Gist," let's put "Speaker knows different rivers across the world and history" and under "Structure" I'll jot "varied stanza lengths and indented lines – looks like a river flowing." Take a moment to record these notes on your note-catcher.
[Pause.]

<u>Gist</u> Speaker knows different rivers across the world and history	
<u>Structure</u> • varied stanza lengths and indented lines – looks like a river flowing	<u>Language</u>
<u>Theme</u>	

[Show Slide 13.]

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

In this first stanza, there just three lines. What do I notice here? Oh, look. The second line repeats the first line—"I've known rivers"—and then describes the rivers in more detail. Hmm. I wonder what that means. [Pause.] Oh, maybe the speaker repeats himself to emphasize his connection to the rivers and to human history. If that is the case, then I need

to figure out what that connection is and why it is important.
Let me jot this down under structure: [Show Slide 14.]

Repetition: “I’ve known rivers” – connection to rivers & human history. Ok. Your turn to write that down. [Pause.]

[Show Slide 15.] **My soul has grown deep like the rivers.**

This stanza is just one line, so it stands out as significant to the meaning of the poem. I’m not quite sure yet what it means, but I do know he is comparing his soul to the rivers. Let me jot that under “Language.” Comparison: my soul = deep like the rivers. [Pause.] [You don’t need to show them that point written down yet—it will appear with the next stanza’s notes the next time you show the graphic organizer.]

I’ll just continue reading. [Show Slide 16.]

**I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.**

This is the stanza with all the rivers in them. It’s also the longest stanza. We know a little about these rivers, but since this is a poem, I want to think about what each river represents. Langston Hughes names these rivers, not the many others in the world – like the Cumberland River here in Tennessee.

Let’s think about the structure in this stanza. What do you notice? [Pause.] You’re right! Every line does start with “I.” That’s another example of repetition. Ok, I’ll jot that down under “structure.” [Pause. You don’t need to show them that point written down yet—it will appear next time you show the graphic organizer.]

When he writes about Euphrates, he says it was “when the dawns were.” What did we learn about Euphrates earlier? [Pause.] Oh, yes, it is in the cradle of civilization, or where human society began. He mentions building a hut on the Congo River, which I remember is in the middle of Africa, actually the heart of Africa. The pyramids and the Nile River were during ancient Egypt civilization thousands of years ago. With Mississippi he talks about Abe Lincoln, so that is

<p>during the Civil War in the 1860s. Oh, that's when slavery in the United States ended.</p> <p>How is this stanza organized? Hmm. [Pause.] This stanza moves from ancient times to more modern times. It's like telling a timeline of the speaker's history? I'll add this to the "structure" column. [Pause.]</p> <p>Do you think the speaker was there for all of these events? [Pause.] No, I don't think so either. So, the "I" doesn't mean him specifically. It represents...hmm... maybe his African American ancestors? Let me add that to what I just wrote. Okay, here's what I've got in my notes. See if they match yours. [Show Slide 17 and pause so students can compare with their own notes.]</p>	
<p>Guided Practice (7 min)</p> <p>Now that I've demonstrated how to look at the poem to look for structural and language clues to meaning, it's your turn to do some more thinking! We'll continue with the third stanza and go line by line to analyze it. [Show Slide 18.] The first line says:</p> <p>I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.</p> <p>What phrases stand out? [Pause.] Good! Let's write that down under the language part of our note-catcher. "Dawns were young" [Show Slide 19.]</p> <p>What do you think that means? [Pause.] Right, "dawn" is the beginning of the day, so maybe Hughes is talking about the beginning of civilization. Let's add that to our note-catcher. [Show Slide 20.]</p> <p>What else? [Pause.] Yes, there's also "bathed in the Euphrates," but what does that represent? [Pause.] That could work. Maybe it means the river was so pure and clean since it was just at the beginning of civilization. Let's add that to our note-catcher. "Bathed = pure and clean" [Show Slide 21.]</p> <p>Let's read the next line. [Show Slide 22.] I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.</p> <p>What phrase have you pulled out and what do you think it means? Jot in your note-catcher. [Pause for students to think and write.] Great thinking! The phrase "lulled me to sleep" makes me think of a baby, too. So, it's like the river is the mother cradling the speaker's ancestors. [Show Slide 23.]</p>	<p>Students will complete note catchers to fill in as the next part of the lesson continues.</p> <p>Students follow along and think and act as instructed, gradually gaining confidence and competence.</p>

[Show Slide 24.] **What do you notice about the language in this line? “I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.” [Pause.]**

Yes, I noticed the phrase, “raised the pyramids above it,” too. We know the pyramids are some of the great structures in ancient history, and the speaker didn’t raise, or build it, by himself. So, what is he conveying with this phrase? [Pause.] Absolutely! He’s saying his people, the African Americans, built these amazing wonders of the world, a great accomplishment. Let’s write that down in our note-catcher. [Show Slide 25.]

[Show Slide 26.] **I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.**

Wow, there’s a lot here to think about. What are some phrases that stand out to you and what do you think they mean? [Pause.] Right, you’re thinking about how Abe Lincoln ended slavery in the southern states during the Civil War with the phrase “Lincoln went down to New Orleans.” Let’s write that down: “Lincoln went down to New Orleans” = Civil War ends slavery. [Show Slide 27.]

[Show Slide 28.] **Others of you noted the phrase, “singing of the Mississippi.” We know rivers don’t sing, so what does Hughes mean in this phrase? [Pause.] Good thinking! Sometimes we sing when we’re happy. In this line, we were talking about Lincoln and how he ended slavery. So this phrase means it’s a joyous time when African Americans were freed from slavery by Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. Let’s put that into a brief phrase in our notes: “singing of the Mississippi” = celebrating end of slavery. [Show Slide 29.]**

[Show Slide 30.] **Oh, you pulled out another phrase? “Muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset” What is the meaning of this phrase? [Pause.] Yes, muddy is brown, so maybe referring to their skin color or to the darkness of slavery. And then it turns golden in the sunset. Like with the end of slavery, there’s hope for more great things. Strong thinking, students! Let’s record that idea. “Muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset” = hope for greatness with end of slavery.**

[Show Slide 31.] **I’ve known rivers:**

<p>Ancient, dusky rivers.</p> <p>My soul has grown deep like the rivers.</p> <p>What do you notice about how the poem ends? [Pause.] Yes, it echoes how the poem started! What might the speaker be trying to tell us with that repetition? [Pause.] Yes, I agree: maybe he wants to emphasize the importance of the relationship between African Americans and history, so we don't forget it. Is that structure or language? [Pause.] Right, that's structure! Jot that down.</p> <p>Repetition of "I've known rivers" and "My soul has grown deep like the river" at the end – conveys importance of relationship between African Americans and history [Show Slide 32. Pause for students to copy.]</p> <p>[Show Slide 33.] Now, let's consider the last line again: My soul has grown deep like the rivers.</p> <p>We had written this in our organizer under language way back at the beginning of the lesson, but we weren't sure what it meant. Now that we've reread the poem closely, what do you think it means?" [Pause.] Good thinking. It could mean a couple of things, right? His soul, or the African American people, have a long history just like the rivers he mentioned. And it's deep, like he means there's a lot of wisdom in that history which can help the people continue on even stronger. Let's write that down. [Show Slide 34.]</p>	
<p><u>Independent Work</u> (2 min)</p> <p>We are just about out of time for today. Thank you so much for taking a deep dive into the poem. I have one more thing I'd like to ask you to do today. [Show Slide 35.]</p> <p>For independent practice after this lesson, write a paragraph explaining how Langston Hughes uses structure and language to develop a theme in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." Students, please copy down the independent practice so you have the assignment when the video ends.</p> <p>You have your note-catcher which has your thoughtful ideas and quotes you can use to support your interpretation of the theme. Remember a theme is the message that the author wants to convey to you, the reader. There lots of ways to write about a theme you have found in this poem. Just be sure to include evidence from the poem, which you have in your notes. Then share your writing with a family member or a friend!</p>	<p>Students write a paragraph that identifies a theme of the poem and uses evidence and notes from their note-catcher to support their idea.</p>

PBS Lesson Series

Closing (1 min)	
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I enjoyed working on “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” with you today! Thank you for inviting me into your home. I look forward to seeing you in our next lesson in Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series! Bye!	
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<https://openupresources.org/ela-curriculum/>