

Learning Outcomes

- To encourage students to hold on to their dreams
- To envision a world without dreams
- To note the striking imagery in the poem
- To appreciate the use of repetition in the poem
- To identify the poetic devices used

Summary: Langston Hughes begins 'Dreams' by advising his readers to hold on to dreams. By "dreams," the speaker means bigger goals, aspirations, and hopes for a person's life rather than dreams at night. He illustrates the pain of a life without dreams by comparing it to *A broken-winged bird / That cannot fly*, suggesting that dreams are something that sustains people. The speaker, a second time, advises man to hold on to dreams because without them life can become *a barren field / Frozen with snow* indicating that it is an emotional or spiritual death. While *a broken-winged bird* can heal and then survive, *a barren field frozen with snow* depicts something almost lost forever. Despite this bleak situation, the speaker asks his readers to *Hold fast to dreams* as there is still hope.

Pre-reading

Predict

Write the title on the board.

Ask students:

1. Do you have dreams?

2. Are they happy, sad, or scary dreams?

3. What do you expect from a poem titled, *Dreams*?

In groups, students discuss about different kinds of dreams and then share their ideas with the class.

READING

Tell students they are going to read a poem about a different kind of dream.

Encourage them to listen carefully and let their books remain closed. Read the whole poem aloud. / Play the audio.

Stanza 1

Ask students:

What advise does the speaker give in the very first line of the poem? What happens if dreams die? What does the speaker compare a life

without dreams to? (The pain of life without dreams is similar to the pain and temporary immobility of an injured bird who cannot fly off the ground.) Explain *metaphor* to the students.

(*Note:* A metaphor is used to describe an object, person, situation or action in a way that helps readers understand it, without using 'like' or 'as')

What happens if you give up on dreams? (Life becomes hopeless)

Stanza 2

Ask students:

Pick out the line that is repeated. Why does the poet repeat the line? (To draw greater attention to the idea, as it is the main message of the poem.) What does the poet compare a life without dreams to in this stanza? (A barren field frozen with snow) What is the difference between the metaphor in the first stanza and the one in the second stanza? (While the first has hope that if the bird is healed, it can fly again, the second metaphor of a barren field covered with frozen snow seems to be bleaker and will be more difficult to revive.) What is the purpose of using a stronger metaphor? (The speaker wants to show the urgency for people not to lose sight of their dreams, as life can be dreadful and meaningless without dreams.) Is the speaker negative, or does he give us a ray of hope?

Poetic Devices

Imagery:

There are two major images which are strikingly powerful yet simple:

- *A broken-winged bird that cannot fly*
- *A barren field frozen with snow*

Metaphors:

The speaker develops his central metaphor in two ways. He compares life without dreams to a broken-winged bird that cannot fly and to a barren field frozen with snow. Since the images are so plain and concrete, the metaphor is clear: life without dreams is no good. This makes the message of the whole

poem clear: hold on to your dreams, because without them, life is meaningless.

Repetition:

The speaker repeats "*Hold fast to dreams*" to draw greater attention to the idea, as it is the central message of the poem. The imagery, metaphor, and other poetic devices are used to support his repeated "argument."

Theme:

The reader should hold fast to their dreams, because without dreams life is barren, and meaningless.

Rhyme scheme:

The second and fourth lines of each quatrain rhyme. abcbdefe

Brevity:

The poem is in eight lines with four lines per stanza. The brevity of the poem shows the urgency of the message, and the speaker's focused point of view.

Post-reading

Ask students:

Was your expectation the same as what you have learnt from this poem? (Refer their Pre-reading prediction)

Allow them to notice how close or far away they were from their expectations.

Group work

Ask students to discuss:

- Do you agree or disagree with the speaker? Why?

STUDENTS' BOOK ANSWER KEY

Dreams

Comprehension

- A. 1. The speaker asks the reader to firmly hold on to their dreams and never let them die or give them up.

2. a. The image of a broken-winged bird is a painful one, as an injured bird, try as it might, cannot fly. The speaker compares a life without dreams to a broken-winged bird to show how painful life will be without dreams to inspire us to carry on.
- b. The image of a barren field covered with snow paints a lonely, desolate image. The speaker compares a life without dreams to such a bleak landscape to show how empty life will be without a dream to work towards.

B. 1. *Free response. Suggested answer:* The speaker does not specify the nature of dreams he is referring to. Dreams could mean hopes or aspirations or goals one works towards or even ideas and visions that one may have.

The comparisons highlight the importance of dreams—life would be unbearable without our dreams.

2. Based on the comparisons made by the speaker, dreams going away seem to be much worse than dreams dying. The former comparison allows the bird to be alive and try flying. The wing is broken, so there might be the possibility of it healing and the bird flying again. However, the comparison with the bleak and empty winter landscape makes it seem that dreams going away is far worse as the speaker's life is totally empty and he does not have any reason to carry on.

3. *Free response.*

Appreciating the Poem

- a. Through repetition the speaker draws attention to the core message of the poem. He highlights it and also ensures that the reader remembers this simple but forceful instruction or plea.
- b. Through comparison and vivid images the speaker has successfully highlighted the core message of the poem in just eight lines. This makes it much more powerful and effective than rambling away and losing focus. The ordinary images are impactful, as most readers will be able to understand and relate to them.

Vocabulary

Free response

Going Further

Free response

QUESTION BANK

Dreams

A. Answer in brief.

1. What are the two themes in the poem, *Dreams*?

Ans: Two themes in "Dreams" are the importance of hope and losing faith. The speaker advises his readers to hold fast to their dreams.

B. Answer in detail.

What are the two metaphors used in the poem? Explain them.

Ans: First, the speaker imagines life as a "broken-winged bird," unable to fly in the absence of dreams. Its second metaphor depicts life as a "barren field / Frozen with snow," if one

fails to dream. The first image suggests that dreams are almost physical things with physical effects, while the second metaphor indicates that it is an emotional or spiritual death. While *a broken-winged bird* can heal and then survive, *a barren field frozen with snow* depicts a situation which is very difficult to regain. However, the poet ends on a note of Hope, saying that these situations arise only 'if' we lose the ability to dream.

C. Choose the correct answer.

What is the message in the poem, "Dreams"?

- Hold on to your dreams as it shows hope.
- Dreams are meaningless, so stop dreaming.
- There is no hope in life with dreams.

Ans: a

D. Read the lines and answer the questions.

Hold fast to dreams

For when dreams go

Life is a barren field

Frozen with snow.

- Pick out the rhyming words in these lines.
- Explain the metaphor in these lines.
- What does this metaphor suggest? Is there hope? Support your answer.

Ans: a. *go, snow*

- Life without dreams would be like *a barren field frozen with snow*, and indicates something almost lost forever.
- It suggests that life without dreams will become barren and an emotional or spiritual death. Yes, there is hope, if we continue to dream.

E. Answer in brief. (Think and Answer)

- How does the brevity and format of the poem, *Dreams*, help to convey the speaker's message?

Ans: The message comes to the forefront because of its simple stylistic format. The poem's brevity implies a sense of urgency, and holding on to dreams is so important that there is no time for more elaborate imagery and descriptions, or even more than eight lines.

- What effect does the line "*Hold fast to dreams*" have on the reader, in the poem *Dreams*?

Ans: The speaker repeats "*Hold fast to dreams*" to draw greater attention to the idea, as it is the central message of the poem. The imagery, metaphor, and other poetic devices are used to support his repeated "argument" about how life will be meaningless without dreams.

Answer in detail. (Think and Answer)

What is the difference between the metaphor in the first stanza and the one in the second stanza? *What is the purpose of using a stronger metaphor?*

Ans: While the first stanza indicates hope if the bird is healed, it can fly again, the second metaphor of a barren field covered with frozen snow seems to be bleaker and will be more difficult to revive. The speaker uses a stronger metaphor as he wants to show the urgency for people not to lose sight of their dreams, as life can be dreadful and meaningless without dreams.