



I, too, sing America

The poem was initially titled 'Epilogue' when it appeared in the collection The Weary Blues in 1926. It has been anthologised repeatedly as an example of Afro-American consciousness.

Langston Hughes
The Weary Blues
(1926)

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
5 But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
10 When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
'Eat in the kitchen,'
Then.

15 Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

READING COMPETENCE

1 READ the poem and find the words meaning the following.

- 1 guests
- 2 become
- 3 venture
- 4 furthermore

2 READ the poem again and do the following activities.

- 1 Hughes wrote the poem from
 - A an African-American man's perspective.
 - B a white American man's perspective.
 - C his own perspective.Can you guess the speaker's identity?
- 2 How does the lack of a concrete identity or historical context add to the poem?
- 3 The poem
 - A is written in free verse.
 - B has a rhyme scheme.
 - C is a ballad.
- 4 What does the speaker mean when he declares that he too can 'sing America'?
- 5 What common practice of racial segregation during the early 20th century do lines 3-4 allude to?



- 6 How does the speaker react?
- A He sinks into despair.
 - B He proclaims that the day after he will join the others at the table.
 - C He does not care.
- 7 What does line 16 imply about the speaker?
- A That he is excessively self-confident.
 - B That he is not ambitious.
 - C That he is proud of being black.
- 8 What belief is Hughes expressing in the poem as regards African Americans?

➤ **COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS AND RELATIONSHIPS**

- 3 **DISCUSS.** Draw a comparison between Hughes's poem and Walt Whitman's poem, *I Hear America Singing* (→ Text Bank 58).