

English 2003/ D535

Professor Bannett

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“From The Dark Tower”

Countee Cullen, an African American poet born in 1903, wrote the very famous Petrarchan style sonnet, “From The Dark Tower” along with many others. Not only was he a poet, but he was also a novelist, a children’s writer, and a playwright during the Harlem Renaissance. At the time of the Harlem Renaissance, Dark Tower was a place on 136th Street in Harlem where poets used to gather. The Harlem Renaissance was a movement, which gave African Americans the opportunity to express their culture and artistic talents. Countee Cullen utilized this sonnet to illustrate the oppression of African Americans; moreover, his use of tone and language and his way of describing the setting, situation, and theme truly made this piece of writing interesting. As an advocate for Countee Cullen, I would love to expose my older brother Brendan to this poem because of the many fascinating attributes it has, and more importantly because of what it stands for.

Ok -
more into is good, but the 90s is general

My brother really takes pride in who he is as an African American male and is even more proud of his roots. I thought that he would be the perfect person to present this poem to because he is very interested in the African American culture. He has done some background research on historical African American figures such as Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, and Muhammad Ali. To him, they have contributed to the African American culture, and he believes that they were “woke”. Being “woke is a term used

why?
An school or for his own interests?

today to describe a person who is consciously aware of the unsound society we live in. He always tells me how much he wishes that more of black history was taught in the schools, and I truly agree. I also thought that actually reading the poem with him and addressing its meaning would help to bring this paper to life. This poem won't teach him our entire history, however it will teach him about Countee Cullen's style of writing, his message behind this sonnet, and it will simply add to his collection of knowledge on what we as a culture and race had to endure for many years.

*great-
ly
developed*

Through the speaker's repetitive use of the word "we" and his use of the word "our", it's quite apparent that he is a black man. He is discussing racism and all that it comes with. It's possible that his ideas have stemmed not only from his own experience of racism but also where it all began for black people, which was during slavery. His choice of words, poetic language, and tone were used collectively to share this idea of racism and slavery, and what it meant to him.

*use present tense when
writing about
literature*

I believe that pain is the first theme that really stood out to me in this sonnet. Really and truly this entire poem represented pain; Cullen used every line to demonstrate the hurt and frustration African Americans went through as a race. For example, "We shall not always plant while others reap" (line 1). This line describes the frustration amongst black people because we live our lives in an unjust system; while we create, build, succeed, strive, and uplift each other, we are still knocked down. The tone in the octet of the poem spoke anger and impatience. "Not always bend to some more subtle brute / we were not made eternally to weep." (Lines 7- 8) We will no longer stand aside and wait patiently for things to change, the change starts today. Although we have so far to go, we are not as far away as we once were. As the poem transitioned to its volta, the

tone slightly changed. Instead of anger and impatience, it became somber. In the last two lines Cullen expressed, "So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds / And wait and tend our agonizing seeds." (Lines 13-14) Despite what we've endured, we must stay together as a culture, heal as a race, and continue to progress and grow.

- would it intrisue your brother?

Another theme that intrigued me was beauty. Countee Cullen subtly mentioned the beauty of black people in the volta of the poem. "The night whose sable breast relieves the stark / White stars is no less lovely being dark" (line 9-10). The words "night" and "dark" are used metaphorically to compare to the black culture and its people. He conveys that "black skin" is no less beautiful than "white skin", we are just as beautiful. In lines 11 and 12, "And there are buds that cannot bloom at all / In the light, but crumple, piteous, and fall" he insinuates that apart, African Americans are not as strong, but when we join together we create a uniqueness. For example in today's world, African Americans have joined together on many occasions in times of tragedy. The cases of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sean Bell, and too many more have united our entire community worldwide. We protested in anger and frustration with hopes that we can change America's unjust system. Also most recently, NFL football players from many teams have been taking a knee during the national anthem. This movement expresses their intolerance for the mistreatment of people of color. Through use of symbolism, Cullen uses the word "buds" to represent the inevitable growth of black people.

What does your brother think of these movements?

As the poem comes to an end, I sense this feeling of hope and longing for. "So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds / And wait, and tend our agonizing seeds." (Lines 13-14) Although the message in line 13 is dark and gloomy, line 14 is saying that despite

in what?

all of the wrong, we will remain optimistic. The "seeds" mentioned symbolizes hope; hope that in the process of waiting and bettering ourselves, things will turn around. We will grow from our experience and in doing so there's nothing left more for us to do than to prosper.

By exposing my brother to a poem as deep and meaningful as this one, it'll make him so much more appreciative of this style of writing. More importantly, he will find satisfaction in the fact that a black man such as Countee Cullen was able to have a voice at that time. Maybe he will be influenced to look up other poems that had similar messages such as "From The Dark Tower". Brendan is a realist and he expresses himself exactly how he feels and he doesn't hold back. When I asked him what he thought about our future as African Americans, he seemed a bit unsure. He wants to believe that one day we will live in a just world but then he simply asked, "Is that even realistic?" I really didn't have an answer for him.

very powerful

Aside from a few grammatical errors, the changes I made to this paper included adding more examples to some of the points I had. Elaborating on my thoughts and ideas will hopefully help my paper to be if not more relatable then more understandable. I also gave a little bit more information about my brother and why I felt like he was the best person to use for this paper. I assumed that Countee Cullen wrote this poem with the purpose of focusing on slavery, however it was broader than that. His focus was a bit more general, such as discussing racism and how it affected African Americans.