

“America” Analysis By Claude McKay

1. First separate the poem into sentences, which should make it feel less overwhelming. For each sentence, write down the line(s) that make up the sentence. Then, next to where it says “vocab,” write down any words in that sentence that you don’t fully know the meaning of or you aren’t sure how it’s being used in that sentence.

Sentence one: lines ___ - ___ Vocab:

Sentence two: lines ___ - ___ Vocab:

Sentence three: lines ___ - ___ Vocab:

Sentence four: lines ___ - ___ Vocab:

Sentence five: lines ___ - ___ Vocab:

2. Next, look up the words that are stopping you from fully understanding the poem, and then paraphrase each sentence, making it far more clear what he’s actually saying by removing a lot of the analogies and symbolism and just outlining each sentence’s main idea(s).

Sentence one:

Sentence two:

Sentence three:

Sentence four:

Sentence five:

3. This poem seems to take two conflicting ideas and makes them clash to make his overall point. What is his overall message of this poem?

4. Which symbols and/or analogies do you find especially effective? Why?

Contrasting "America" and "To America"

5. Both "America" by McKay and "To America" by Johnson are poems from the Harlem Renaissance that deal with African American struggles against racism. However, they both tackle the topic differently. Which poem do you find to be more effective and why?

6. Which poem do you find to be more hopeful in its message about dealing with racism? Why?