

Any Human to Another

Countee Cullen

The ills I sorrow at
Not me alone
Like an arrow,
Pierce to the marrow,
5 Through the fat
And past the bone.

Your grief and mine
Must intertwine
Like sea and river,
10 Be fused and mingle,
Diverse yet single,
Forever and forever. **A**

Let no man be so proud
And confident,
15 To think he is allowed
A little tent
Pitched in a meadow
Of sun and shadow
All his little own.
20 Joy may be shy, unique,
Friendly to a few,
Sorrow never scorned to speak
To any who
Were false or true. **B**

25 Your every grief
Like a blade
Shining and unsheathed¹
Must strike me down.
Of bitter aloes² wreathed,
30 My sorrow must be laid
On your head like a crown.

1. **unsheathed:** removed from its protective case.
2. **bitter aloes:** spiny-leaved plants whose juice is used to make a bad-tasting medicine.

COMMON CORE RL.9

A THEME

Remember that **theme** is a work's underlying message about life or human nature. Reread lines 1–12, and then consider the title of the poem. In your own words, state the theme of the poem in one sentence. Then, discuss whether you think this theme is relevant to life.

B FIGURATIVE MEANING

Identify two examples of **personification** in lines 20–24. What qualities are indicated by these lines?

Storm Ending

Jean Toomer

Thunder blossoms gorgeously above our heads,
Great, hollow, bell-like flowers,
Rumbling in the wind,
Stretching clappers to strike our ears . . . **C**
5 Full-lipped flowers
Bitten by the sun
Bleeding rain
Dripping rain like golden honey—
And the sweet earth flying from the thunder.

C FIGURATIVE MEANING
What is thunder compared to in lines 1–4? Explain what qualities are emphasized by this comparison.



Field and Storm (2003), April Gornik. Oil on linen, 74" × 95". Courtesy of the artist and Danese Gallery, New York.

A Black Man Talks of Reaping

Arna Bontemps

I have sown beside all waters in my day.
I planted deep, within my heart the fear
That wind or fowl would take the grain away.
I planted safe against this stark, lean year. **D**

5 I scattered seed enough to plant the land
In rows from Canada to Mexico,
But for my reaping¹ only what the hand
Can hold at once is all that I can show.

Yet what I sowed and what the orchard yields
10 My brother's sons are gathering stalk and root,
Small wonder then my children glean² in fields
They have not sown, and feed on bitter fruit. **E**

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1. **reaping**: harvesting grain.
 2. **glean**: gather grain left behind by reapers.



Sunflowers, Charly Palmer. Mixed media collage on canvas, 48" x 24". © Charly Palmer.

▲ Analyze Visuals

What elements of this painting reflect the theme of the poem?

D FIGURATIVE MEANING

Reread lines 1–4. What idea do the words *sown*, *planted*, and *grain* have in common?

E THEME

In lines 11–12, why are the children's gleanings described as "bitter fruit"?