

Name _____ period _____

AP Language/Composition—Rumfelt
Poetry in American Literature

Directions: Read and annotate the pieces in this packet, and read the background information in provided regarding the literary movements. Then, respond to the poems. Be prepared to discuss these pieces in class when you return.

For each poem, annotate/ take notes on the following:

- **SPEAKER** (Who is speaking? How do they feel? How do you know?)
- **TONE** (What is the speaker's attitude about the subject? Find lines/phrases that show tone.)
- **IMAGERY** (How do the images add to the poem? What inferences can we make based on these images?)
- **CONTEXT** (Read the background information about the literary movements/ time periods and draw conclusions about what they are saying in the poem. Relate to the time period as well.)
- **OTHER POETIC ELEMENTS** (Sound elements, symbolism, diction, figurative language)

Part One: Harlem Renaissance Poetry: The Harlem Renaissance is a period in American history where the influence of African-Americans in politics, literature, music, culture and society grew and became a part of the mainstream. The period has its roots in the early 1900's when a migration of middle class African-Americans to a newly built suburb called Harlem in New York City caused a stir. Read and annotate the poems below (or take extensive notes on your own paper). Define any words you don't know.

November Cotton Flower | Jean Toomer

Boll-weevil's coming, and the winter's cold,
Made cotton-stalks look rusty, season's old,
And cotton, scarce as any southern snow,
Was vanishing; the branch, so pinched and slow,
Failed in its function as the autumn rake;
Drouth fighting soil had caused the soil to take
All water from the streams; dead birds were found
In wells a hundred feet below the ground--
Such was the season when the flower bloomed
Old folks were startled, and it soon assumed
Significance. Superstition saw
Something it had never seen before:
Brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear,
Beauty so sudden for that time of year.

Refugee in America | Langston Hughes

There are words like *Freedom*
Sweet and wonderful to say.
On my heart-strings freedom sings
All day everyday.

There are words like *Liberty*
That almost make me cry.
If you had known what I knew
You would know why.

My City | James Weldon Johnson

When I come down to sleep death's endless night,
The threshold of the unknown dark to cross,
What to me then will be the keenest loss,
When this bright world blurs on my fading sight?
Will it be that no more I shall see the trees
Or smell the flowers or hear the singing birds
Or watch the flashing streams or patient herds?
No, I am sure it will be none of these.

But, ah! Manhattan's sights and sounds, her smells,
Her crowds, her throbbing force, the thrill that comes
From being of her a part, her subtle spells,
Her shining towers, her avenues, her slums--
O God! the stark, unutterable pity,
To be dead, and never again behold my cit

Part Two: American Dream Poetry: The poets in this unit explore perspectives on life and death with a particularly American perspective. All of these poets were writing in America at the turn of the century, and this experience informed their poetry. Read and annotate the poems below (or take extensive notes on your own paper). Define any words you don't know.

Chicago | Carl Sandburg

HOG Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I
have seen your painted women under the gas lamps
luring the farm boys.

And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it
is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to
kill again.

And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the
faces of women and children I have seen the marks
of wanton hunger.

And having answered so I turn once more to those who
sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer
and say to them:

Come and show me another city with lifted head singing
so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.

Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on
job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the
little soft cities;

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning
as a savage pitted against the wilderness,
Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking,
Planning,
Building, breaking, rebuilding,

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with
white teeth,

Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young
man laughs,

Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has
never lost a battle,

Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse,
and under his ribs the heart of the people,

Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of
Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog
Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with
Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

I Hear America Singing | Walt Whitman

I HEAR America singing, the varied carols I hear;
Those of mechanics—each one singing his, as it should be, blithe and strong;
The carpenter singing his, as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his, as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work;
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat—the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck; 5
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench—the hatter singing as he stands;
The wood-cutter's song—the ploughboy's, on his way in the morning, or at the noon intermission, or at sundown;
The delicious singing of the mother—or of the young wife at work—or of the girl sewing or washing—Each singing what
belongs to her, and to none else;
The day what belongs to the day—At night, the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing, with open mouths, their strong melodious songs. 10

Richard Cory | Edwin Arlington Robinson

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean-favoured and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good Morning!" and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich, yes, richer than a king,
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine -- we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked and waited for the light,
And went without the meat and cursed the bread,
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet in his head.