Poetry Means the World to Me
By Tony Medina
2002

Tony Medina is an American poet. In his book Love to Langston, Medina uses poetry to tell the story of Langston Hughes’ life using the voice of Hughes, as he imagines it. Hughes was an important and famous African American poet whose work is still celebrated today. In this poem, Tony Medina explores the importance of poetry to Hughes. As you read, take notes on the different ways that poetry helps the speaker in the poem.

[1] Poetry means the world to me
it’s how I laugh and sing
how I cry and ask why

Poetry comforts me
[5] when I use jazz or
the blues or the way
regular folks talk —
the language
they use

[10] Words don’t always
have to be neat
and polished
like a statue

They should be
[15] used used used
to say what you like
or don’t like
what you see think
or feel —

[20] Words to fight against
hate and unnecessary
suffering

Poetry is what I use
to say
[25] I love you

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. **PART A:** Which of sentence describes the theme of the poem?
   A. Not many people understand the importance of poetry.
   B. Poetry has many important functions to the speaker.
   C. If people wrote and read more poetry, the world would be a better place.
   D. Poetry has become an art that is rarely used today.

2. **PART B:** Which detail from the poem best supports the answer to Part A?
   A. “it’s how I laugh and sing / how I cry and ask why” (Lines 2-3)
   B. “the blues or the way / regular folks talk —” (Lines 6-7)
   C. “Words don’t always / have to be neat” (Lines 10-11)
   D. “They should be / used used used” (Lines 14-15)

3. Which of the following best describes how the speaker changes the subject in stanza 3-4 (Lines 10-19)?
   A. The speaker turns from talking about poetry to talking about music.
   B. The speaker turns from talking about feeling sad to feeling angry.
   C. The speaker turns from talking about the past to speaking about the present.
   D. The speaker turns from speaking about themselves to speaking in general.

4. How do stanzas 3-4 contribute to the poem (Lines 10-19)?
   A. It shows how most people don’t know how to express themselves.
   B. It tries to teach readers the right way to write poetry.
   C. It reveals that poetry often appears perfect.
   D. It stresses how you don’t need to have a perfect way to express yourself.

5. What is the effect of repeating “used” in line 15?
Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the poem, the speaker describes how important poetry is to them as an expression of love. What are the different ways that you use words to express your love to family and friends?

2. How does Tony Medina's poem about Langston Hughes help us better understand him? How do you think poetry can help us better understand people? How does poetry help you understand people in your life?