

Like a Caged Bird

JA _____

Part A.

Directions: Read the poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar, published in 1899. Answer the questions that follow.

Sympathy

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
 When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
 When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
 Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
 And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting—
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
 When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
 But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!

—Paul Laurence Dunbar

1. Which characters can be considered “caged birds”?
2. What is the tone of the first stanza?
3. At what point did the following characters “sing”?
 - a. Grant
 - b. Jefferson

4. At what point did the following characters "beat" their "wings"?

a. Grant

b. Jefferson

5. What scars do the following characters bear?

a. Grant

b. Jefferson

6. What is the theme of "Sympathy"?

7. How is "Sympathy" thematically similar to *A Lesson before Dying*?

Part B.

Directions: Decide which character in *A Lesson before Dying* the persona (speaker) of "Sympathy" would most likely be. On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph explaining your choice.

Part C.

Directions: On a separate sheet of paper, write original lyrics for a song that one of the "caged birds" from *A Lesson before Dying* would sing.