

Name: _____

Class: _____

A Litany for Survival

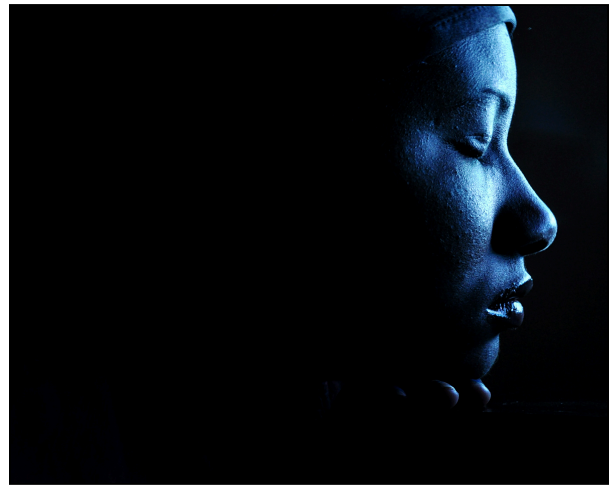
By Audre Lorde

1978

Audre Lorde (1934-1992) was an American writer, feminist, and civil rights activist. She was a self-described "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet." In her life and work, she confronted and addressed injustices of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. Her poetry often expresses anger and outrage at the civil and social injustices she observed throughout her life. In this poem, a speaker describes the lives of people who do not have the luxury to dream.

As you read, take notes on the speaker's experiences and point of view.

- [1] For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial¹ and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge²
- [5] the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
- [10] seeking a now that can breed³
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours;
- [15] For those of us
who were imprinted⁴ with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
- [20] this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph



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1. **Crucial** (*adjective*) decisive or critical; important
2. **Indulge** (*verb*) to allow oneself to enjoy the pleasure of something
3. **Breed** (*verb*) to produce or create
4. **Imprint** (*verb*) to fix firmly in someone's mind

We were never meant to survive.

- [25] And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
- [30] of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
- [35] when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
- [40] but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.

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Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. What statement best describes the theme of the poem?
 - A. Some people will never be ready to chase their dreams.
 - B. Oppression prevents people from living their lives to the fullest.
 - C. Fear causes people to hide their dreams and pursue them in secret.
 - D. People cannot succeed without the support of their friends and family.

2. Which statement best describes how the speaker's point of view is established in lines 1-5?
 - A. The speaker describes their greatest fear.
 - B. The speaker claims that they never give up on their dreams.
 - C. The speaker explains that they wish to speak for those who cannot.
 - D. The speaker depicts themselves as living apart from those who can dream.

3. What impact does the word "illusion" (Line 20) have on the poem?
 - A. It reveals why some people are more imaginative than others.
 - B. It introduces the speaker's feelings that nothing is dependable.
 - C. It reveals why some people prefer to live in a fantasy rather than reality.
 - D. It suggests that that speaker believes they are safer than they actually are.

4. How does fear contribute to the theme of the poem?
 - A. Fear prevents the speaker from being honest.
 - B. Fear prevents the speaker from sleeping at night.
 - C. Fear prevents people from trusting anything in their lives.
 - D. Fear prevents some people from remembering their dreams.

5. Refer to the background information provided about the author in the **Student Intro**. How does the author's cultural and personal background influence the speaker's point of view? Use evidence from the poem to support your response.

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 final stanza of the poem, the speaker states, "So it is better to speak / remembering / we were never meant to survive." What does this mean to you? Describe a time when you spoke up for yourself.

2. In the poem, the speaker describes people who live in constant fear. How do you think fear can be used to control and oppress people? Describe a time when you were afraid. Were you able to overcome this fear? If so, how?

3. In the poem, the speaker describes people who live on a "shoreline" and "alone". Have you ever felt like you were living on the outside? If so, Explain.