

To America

James Weldon Johnson

How can a sequence of questions function as an accusation?

TOTAL TIME	TUMBLETA PASSAGE LOCATION
30 minutes	Poem - complete poem

TEACHER SETUP

Open the work in the Enhanced Reader and cue the span using the START and END anchors below.

START	How would you have us, as we are?
END	Or tightening chains about your feet?
PASSAGE ID	sec-toamerica-01

THE MOVE

Analyze how rhetorical questions force an audience to confront consequences

WHY THIS PASSAGE

Every line is phrased as a question, but the poem is not seeking information. Each paired alternative makes neutrality impossible: progress or despair, rising or falling, strength or restraint. By the final image, America's treatment of "us" is shown as affecting America itself.

MARK

Underline each either/or pair. Circle words of upward or forward motion. Box words of burden or restraint. Star the final image where the consequence shifts onto America.

NOTICE

- Which alternatives describe the group addressed as us?
- Which alternatives describe America's own future?
- Why does the final pair make oppression self-defeating?

THINK

Answer provisionally: How can a sequence of questions function as an accusation? Choose the strongest interpretation you can defend from this passage alone.

WRITE

Write a short evidence-based response. Use at least two details from the assigned passage and explain how they support your interpretation.

CLOSE

Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and say why.

STRONG ANSWER

The questions function as an accusation because each pair demands that America recognize the consequences of its choices. The poem argues that restricting Black Americans does not merely harm them; it becomes a chain around the nation's own feet.

EVIDENCE

Use one early either/or question and the final image of wings and chains.

WATCH FOR

Do not answer each question literally. Explain what the sequence makes the audience responsible for choosing.

SOLO

Read independently.

SUPPORTED

Narration + highlighting.

LISTENING

Listen; same evidence task.

STUDENT PAGE · GRADE 8 · LESSON 286

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WORK	To America
TUMBLETA PASSAGE LOCATION	Poem - complete poem

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Your teacher will open or cue the work in the Enhanced Reader. Use the location and verbatim anchors below to confirm the assigned span.

START

How would you have us, as we are?

END

Or tightening chains about your feet?

READ / LISTEN TO THE ASSIGNED PASSAGE SOLO: read independently. SUPPORTED: use narration and highlighting. LISTENING: listen to the assigned passage. The question and evidence task stay the same.

1. MARK Underline each either/or pair. Circle words of upward or forward motion. Box words of burden or restraint. Star the final image where the consequence shifts onto America.
2. NOTICE Which alternatives describe the group addressed as us? Which alternatives describe America's own future? Why does the final pair make oppression self-defeating?
3. THINK Answer provisionally: How can a sequence of questions function as an accusation?
4. WRITE Write a short response using at least two pieces of evidence from this passage.
5. CLOSE Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and say why.