

List two details from the writer's biography that might have influenced the writing or your understanding of the poem.

1. Cortez's belief that poetry can be a vehicle for social reform
2. Cortez is a jazz poet, but says "poetry/ will not/ sing jazz/ through/ constricted mouth," perhaps implying that if people don't rise up, the poetry, or just talk, alone, can't do it.

As you read the poem: Underline parts that relate to historical facts, especially African American issues
Circle words/phrases that stir up emotions
Place a question mark next to ideas that you don't recognize and may need to research
Place [] around parts of the poem that seem musical (call and response, rhythm, refrain, repetition, etc.)

After you read the poem, answer the following questions, quoting parts of the poem that led to your responses:

1. What historical background does a reader need to better understand this poem?

The oppression of African Americans, "exaggerated look of captivity," "stylized look of submission,"
"dehumanized look of fear"

The civil rights movement, civil unrest in California, like the Watts riot

2. How does the poem relate to African American issues or jazz? Refer to historical context and text of the poem.

Cortez urges the audience to rise up: "if we don't fight," "if we don't organize and unify and/ get the power to control our own lives"

Cortez implies poetry and jazz must come from a mouth that is not constricted—perhaps referring to those who are not active in the cause, rather "dying in saw dust/of your toenail."

3. Look at the emotional words you circled. Are those emotions more negative, or more positive? Both? What emotions do you think the writer wanted those words make you feel?

The poem has many negative words and images: "decomposed look of repression," "bizarre look of suicide," "baboons/waiting to be fed by tourists," "stuffed bird"

The poet wants the audience to relate to the horror of abuse

4. What musical qualities of the poem or song lyrics might influence the audience? How?

Break: The line "And there it is," and the two stanzas beginning with "In fact," create natural pauses, or breaks, and indicate a change in the direction of the poem

Groove: Lines of varying length create a type of syncopation

5. Think about your responses to questions 2-4. What might the poet be persuading the audience to think or do? Write your responses in a sentence.

Cortez wants the audience to rise up and take action against oppression and not just talk about it, like the metaphors and symbols of poetry.

6. What did you learn from reading this poem?
