

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

1. Rodriguez saw destructive behavior firsthand during his gang days.
2. Rodriguez works with troubled youth, like the girl in the poem.

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?

Michael Meade is an author, mythologist, and storyteller who works with at-risk youth, homeless populations, returning veterans, prisoners, and youth involved in the gang life. He often collaborates in this multicultural work with Luis J. Rodriguez
Cutting

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

References to "silences" and "fears" of, not only gang members, but people of color living in areas like Watts or East L. A.
The poem has many musical references, although not necessarily jazz music: "octave spiral," the "bass fluctuates"
The poem implies the music will soothe or heal: "let the rhythm speak"

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 writer uses many negative words/phrases ("slash," "screams," "fears," "pangs") to convey a sense of hopelessness which has turned to hopefulness at the end of the poem ("caresses" "violins...stay our hands," "learn to play").

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

Linear: The poem is in complete sentences with a clear beginning, middle, and end which also makes it more formal/traditional
Musical terms ("bass," "octave," "rhythm," "violins") makes the audience think about music

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.

The writer wants the audience to "hear" and relate to the pain of the girl, and perhaps let the "music" of the emotions heal, or "stay our hands."

6. What did you learn from reading this poem?