

## Speech to the Young Speech to the Progress-Toward

Poem by Gwendolyn Brooks

## Mother to Son

Poem by Langston Hughes

# What is good ADVICE?

### COMMON CORE

**RL1** Cite the evidence that supports inferences drawn from the text. **RL4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in text; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

Suggestions about how to improve your grades or how to approach the new guy at school can be welcome, but how do you know if it's good advice? Sometimes it depends on who gives it. Is it someone who has been there and learned from his or her own experience? Is it someone who cares about you or has a stake in the outcome? In the two poems you are about to read, the speakers share what they have learned with a younger generation.

**DISCUSS** Imagine you need to bring up your grade in science class. In a small group, brainstorm a list of three people you would ask for advice on how to improve your study habits and grade, and tell why you consider these people a good source for advice.



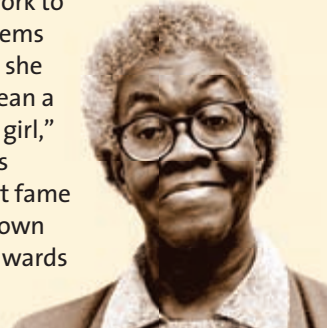
## Meet the Authors

### Gwendolyn Brooks

1917–2000

#### Young Talent

As a budding young poet, Gwendolyn Brooks went to hear Langston Hughes give a speech at her church. Brooks's mother insisted that she show some of her work to Hughes. He read her poems on the spot and told her she had talent. "That did mean a lot to a sixteen-year-old girl," Brooks later said. Brooks went on to achieve great fame as a poet. She used her own money to fund literary awards for young writers.

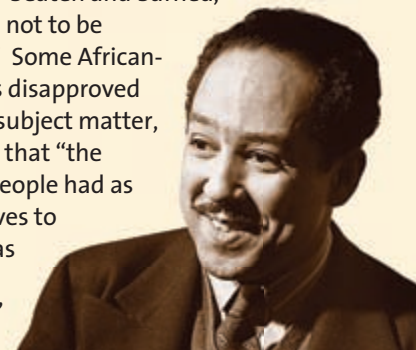


### Langston Hughes

1902–1967

#### World Traveler

Langston Hughes was voted "class poet" at his high school in Cleveland, Ohio. After graduation, Hughes visited his father, who was living in Mexico. During the trip, Hughes wrote "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." It remains one of his best-known works. Hughes continued to see the world, traveling extensively in Africa and Europe. The poetry he sent home helped build his literary reputation. Hughes described the people he wrote about as "beaten and baffled, but determined not to be wholly beaten." Some African-American critics disapproved of his choice of subject matter, but Hughes felt that "the masses of our people had as much in their lives to put into books as did those more fortunate ones."



### ● POETIC FORM: LYRIC POETRY

If you're a poet and you want to share your deepest feelings on a topic such as love, death, or the power of nature, what kind of poem would you write? A good choice would be a **lyric poem**. The purpose of a lyric poem is to express personal thoughts and feelings. To achieve this purpose, lyric poems have the following characteristics. They

- are short
- have a single speaker who expresses personal thoughts and feelings
- focus on a single, strong idea

### ● TEXT ANALYSIS: SOUND DEVICES

Writers use sound devices to create a musical quality and to call attention to certain words. **Alliteration** is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words. Notice the repeated *w* sound in the following example:

*When the wind whispers*

Another sound device based on repetition is **assonance**, in which a vowel sound is repeated in two or more syllables.

*Poetry is old, ancient, goes back far.*

As you read the following poems, notice the alliteration and assonance, and think about the effect of these sound devices.

### ● READING SKILL: MAKE INFERENCES

As you try to understand the speakers and the advice they give in these two poems, look for clues that hint at their experiences, attitudes, and personality. Combine these clues with your own knowledge or experience to **make inferences**, logical guesses about what the poet doesn't state directly. Use inference equations like the one shown to record your inferences about the speakers.

The title of the poem is "Speech to the Young."

+

Older people like to give advice.

=

Speaker is an older person.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Authors Online



Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com). KEYWORD: HML8-633

# Speech to the Young

## Speech to the Progress-Toward

(Among them Nora and Henry III)

Gwendolyn Brooks

Say to them,  
say to the down-keepers,  
the sun-slappers,  
the self-soilers,  
5 the harmony-hushers,  
“Even if you are not ready for day  
it cannot always be night.”  
You will be right.  
For that is the hard home-run. **A**

10 Live not for battles won.  
Live not for the-end-of-the-song.  
Live in the along. **B**

### Analyze Visuals ▶

What can you **infer** about the relationship between the girl and the woman in the picture?

- A SOUND DEVICES**  
How many examples of **alliteration** can you find in the first stanza?
- B MAKE INFERENCES**  
What attitude does the speaker express in lines 10–12?



# Mother to Son

Langston Hughes



*Lady*, Ernest Crichlow. Etching, 22" × 18". Photo by Maureen Turci, Mojo Portfolio. Courtesy of the Estate of Ernest Crichlow.

Well, son, I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it,  
And splinters,  
5 And boards torn up,  
And places with no carpet on the floor—  
Bare.  
But all the time  
I've been a-climbin' on,  
10 And reachin' landin's,  
And turnin' corners,  
And sometimes goin' in the dark  
Where there ain't been no light.  
So boy, don't you turn back. **C**  
15 Don't you set down on the steps  
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.  
Don't you fall now—  
For I've still goin', honey,  
I've still climbin',  
20 And life for me ain't been no crystal stair. **D**

## ▲ Analyze Visuals

What personality **traits** would you expect the woman in the painting to have?

## **C** SOUND DEVICES

Notice the **assonance** created by the use of the long *o* sound in lines 12–14. What words contain this sound?

## **D** LYRIC POETRY

What is the main idea the speaker is expressing about her life?

## Comprehension

- 1. Recall** In “Speech to the Young,” what does the speaker tell the young to say?
- 2. Recall** What two things does the speaker in “Speech to the Young” say we should *not* live for?
- 3. Represent** Create a sketch of the stairway described by the speaker in “Mother to Son.”

### COMMON CORE

**RL 1** Cite the evidence that supports inferences drawn from the text. **RL 4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in text; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

## Text Analysis

- 4. Interpret Meaning** What does the speaker in “Speech to the Young” mean by “Even if you are not ready for the day/it cannot always be night”?
- 5. Examine Dialect** In “Mother to Son,” words such as *ain’t* and *kinder* are examples of **dialect**, the particular way language is used in a certain place or by a certain group of people. Dialect is an important element of Langston Hughes’s style. What does Hughes’s use of dialect help you to understand about the speaker?
- 6. Identify Figurative Language** What **metaphor** is used throughout “Mother to Son”? What does it tell you about the mother’s life and how she has responded to it?
- 7. Make Inferences About the Speakers** In your own words, describe how you picture the speaker in each poem. Use the inference equations you made as you read to help you.
- 8. Analyze Sound Devices** For each poem, use a chart like the one shown to record the instances of **alliteration** and **assonance**. Which poem makes greater use of these sound devices?

“Speech to the Young”	
Alliteration	Assonance
say/sun-slappers/self-soilers	

- 9. Analyze Lyric Poetry** Review the relationship between the purpose and characteristics of lyric poems on page 633. Next, think about each poet’s message. Then explain why each poet’s choice to use a lyric poem as his or her form was an appropriate one.

## Extension and Challenge

- 10. Creative Project: Poetry** Write a short poem in which the speaker explains a lesson learned from life.

### What is good **ADVICE**?

Which speaker’s advice do you think is best? Why?