**Reading and Literary Analysis**

**How It Feels to Be Colored Me**

**by Zora Neale Hurston**

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| 1 | I remember the very day that I became colored. Up to my thirteenth year I lived in the little Negro town of Eatonville, Florida. It is exclusively a colored town. The only white people I knew passed through the town going to or coming from Orlando. The native whites rode dusty horses, the Northern tourists chugged down the sandy village road in automobiles. The town knew the Southerners and never stopped cane chewing1 when they passed. But the Northerners were something else again. They were peered at cautiously from behind curtains by the timid. The more venturesome would come out on the porch to watch them go past and got just as much pleasure out of the tourists as the tourists got out of the village.… |
| 2 | During this period, white people differed from colored to me only in that they rode through town and never lived there. They liked to hear me “speak pieces” and sing and wanted to see me dance the parse-me-la, and gave me generously of their small silver for doing these things, which seemed strange to me for I wanted to do them so much that I needed bribing to stop. Only they didn’t know it. The colored people gave no dimes. They deplored any joyful tendencies in me, but I was their Zora nevertheless. I belonged to them, to the nearby hotels, to the county—everybody’s Zora. |
| 3 | But changes came in the family when I was thirteen, and I was sent to school in Jacksonville. I left Eatonville, the town of the oleanders, as Zora. When I disembarked from the river-boat at Jacksonville, she was no more. It seemed that I had suffered a sea change. I was not Zora of Orange County any more, I was now a little colored girl. I found it out in certain ways. In my heart as well as in the mirror, I became a fast brown—warranted not to rub nor run. |
| 4 | But I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it. Even in the helter skelter skirmish that is my life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.2 |
| 5 | Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me. Slavery is sixty years in the past. The operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you. The terrible struggle3 that made me an American out of a potential slave said “On the line!” The Reconstruction said “Get Set!”; and the generation before said “Go!” I am off to a flying start and I must not halt in the stretch to look behind and weep. Slavery is the price I paid for civilization, and the choice was not with me. It is a bully adventure and worth all that I have paid through my ancestors for it. No one on earth ever had a greater chance for glory. The world to be won and nothing to be lost. It is thrilling to think—to know that for any act of mine, I shall get twice as much praise or twice as much blame. It is quite exciting to hold the center of the national stage, with the spectators not knowing whether to laugh or to weep.… |
| 6 | But in the main, I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall. Against a wall in company with other bags, white, red and yellow. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of small things priceless and worthless. A first-water diamond, an empty spool, bits of broken glass, lengths of string, a key to a door long since crumbled away, a rusty knife-blade, old shoes saved for a road that never was and never will be, a nail bent under the weight of things too heavy for any nail, a dried flower or two still a little fragrant. In your hand is the brown bag. On the ground before you is the jumble it held—so much like the jumble in the bags, could they be emptied, that all might be dumped in a single heap and the bags refilled without altering the content of any greatly. A bit of colored glass more or less would not matter. Perhaps that is how the Great Stuffer of Bags filled them in the first place—who knows? |

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1**cane chewing:** chewing sugar cane

2**oyster knife:** a reference to the popular expression “The world is my oyster.”

**The terrible struggle:** i.e., the Civil War. The Reconstruction was the period

immediately following the war, when the South was reintegrated into the Union.

Annotations from “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” by Zora Neale Hurston from *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Published by W. W. Norton, New York, NY, 1985

 1. Hurston’s descriptions of her thoughts and experiences indicate that this excerpt is —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | a parable |
| b. | autobiographical |
| c. | biographical |
| d. | a parody |

 2. Why did Hurston become aware of prejudice only when she moved to Jacksonville?

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| --- | --- |
| a. | Everyone in her hometown was African American. |
| b. | She was allowed to perform for tourists in her town. |
| c. | There was little discrimination in the state of Florida. |
| d. | She always hid when outsiders came to her town. |

 3. When Hurston states, “I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less,” she contends that —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | minorities do not get the opportunities white people get |
| b. | her upbringing has given her a feeling of helplessness |
| c. | belonging to a minority gives special strengths to people |
| d. | skin color is not what determines success |

 4. The author’s positive tone in paragraphs 4 and 5 supports her belief that —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | nature has given her a bad deal |
| b. | she can achieve great success |
| c. | her life is all helter-skelter |
| d. | she paid a high price for slavery |

 5. To describe the gains made by her ancestors since the Civil War, Hurston uses the analogy of —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | tending a garden |
| b. | writing a book |
| c. | running a race |
| d. | building a monument |

 6. Hurston’s simile comparing herself to “a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall” *most likely* evokes in the reader feelings of —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | empathy |
| b. | envy |
| c. | distance |
| d. | despair |

 7. In the final paragraph the imagery of the jumble in the bags refers to the —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | limited opportunities for blacks |
| b. | demoralizing effects of discrimination |
| c. | insignificance of racism |
| d. | superficial nature of racial differences |

 8. Much of the power of this selection comes from its —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | satirical bitterness |
| b. | forthright, personal tone |
| c. | historical description of the South |
| d. | detailed examples of racial injustice |

 9. A political assumption in this selection is that —

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| a. | skin color does not hinder success |
| b. | the effects of segregation are long lasting |
| c. | we must all fight hard for integration |
| d. | the wealthy should aid those less fortunate |

 10. Hurston’s belief that success is “to the strong” contributes to the reader’s recognition of her as —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | a singer and dancer |
| b. | a little country girl |
| c. | an ambitious woman |
| d. | just like other African Americans |

*The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was adopted in 1920, giving women the right to vote. Unfortunately, many African American women were denied that right. The following excerpt is from an article published in The Nation on March 2, 1921. The writer was reporting on the 1921 convention of the National Woman’s Party. Alice Paul, a white woman, was the head of the party.*

**Alice Paul Pulls the Strings**

**by Freda Kirchwey**

Some day the story of the working of the National Women’s machine will be told. It will be an interesting story, full of strange contradictions.

The efforts—wholly unsuccessful—of the representatives of the colored women would form a tragic chapter of the same story. A delegation of sixty women sent by colored women’s organizations in fourteen States arrived in Washington several days before the convention. They requested an interview with Alice Paul so that they might take up with the question of the disenfranchisement of the women of their race. They were told Miss Paul was too busy to see them. They said they would wait till she had time. Finally, grudgingly, she yielded. The colored women presented their case .…

We have come here as members of various organizations and from different sections representing the five million colored women of this country. We are deeply appreciative of the heroic devotion of the National Woman’s Party to the women’s suffrage movement and of the tremendous sacrifices made under your leadership in securing the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment . …

The world has moved forward in these seventy years and the colored women of this country have been moving with it. They know the value of the ballot, if honestly used, to right the wrongs of any class. Knowing this, they have also come today to call your attention to the flagrant violations of the intent and purposes of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment in the elections of 1920. These violations occurred in the Southern States, where is to be found the great mass of colored women, and it has not been made secret that wherever white women did not use the ballot, it was counted worth while to relinquish it in order that it might be denied colored women. …

Therefore, we are assembled to ask that you will use your influence to have the convention of the National Woman’s Party appoint a special committee to ask Congress for an investigation of the violations of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment in the election of 1920.

Miss Paul was indifferent to this appeal and resented the presence of the delegation. Their chance of being heard at the convention was gone.… And only by the use of tactics bordering on Alice Paul’s own vigor and persistence, did their spokesman—the delegate from New York—get a moment to present a resolution on their behalf—a resolution which was promptly defeated and which left the question precisely where it stood.

 11. In this article the reader learns about the position of the delegation of African American women *mostly* through —

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| a. | the author’s description  |
| b. | a quotation from their statement |
| c. | Alice Paul’s reaction to the delegation |
| d. | the defeat of their resolution |

 12. The presentation by the delegation does all of the following *except* —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | describe whom they represent |
| b. | document electoral abuses |
| c. | appeal for aid in ending abuses  |
| d. | criticize Paul for not helping |

 13. The English word meaning “the right to vote” that comes from the old French word franc is —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | enfranchisement |
| b. | finances |
| c. | framework |
| d. | infraction |

 14. Alice Paul had been unwilling to meet with the African American women, so their statement addresses her hostility by —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | explaining what they have accomplished |
| b. | complimenting her leadership |
| c. | asking for someone else’s assistance |
| d. | demanding the vote for African American women |

 15. The content and tone of this article show that its author was —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | supportive of the delegation |
| b. | highly critical of the delegation |
| c. | indifferent to the concerns of the delegation |
| d. | very supportive of Alice Paul |

 16. A reader can infer from this article that the author believes in —

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| --- | --- |
| a. | avoiding vigorous and persistent tactics  |
| b. | appointing Congressional committees |
| c. | equal rights for people of all races  |
| d. | telling tragic stories about politics  |

**Edit an Analysis of Nonfiction**

(1) In her memoir “The Girl Who Wouldn’t Talk,” Maxine Hong Kingston retells a disturbing memory about a childhood acquaintance in order to reveal unpleasant but important truths about herself. (2) Kingston, a Chinese American, writes about her experiences growing up in California. (3) At first glance, her memoir is a description of her interactions with a Chinese girl who Kingston “hated” for her shyness, inability to play sports, and refusal to talk. (4) Throughout the memoir, however, Kingston uses literary techniques to suggest that she hates the girl who won’t talk only because Kingston sees the girl’s own qualities in herself.

(5) The narrator’s dialogue, which sounds typical of a sixth grader, contrasts with her more “adult” narration. (6) This contrast suggests that Kingston, as an adult narrator, is commenting on—and condemning—her own childish behavior.

 17. Which sentence states the essay’s thesis?

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| --- | --- |
| a. | 1 |
| b. | 3 |
| c. | 5 |
| d. | 6 |

 18. Which of the following additions to the introductory paragraph would best support the author’s thesis?

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| --- | --- |
| a. | an accurate description of the story’s major events |
| b. | a sentence identifying specific literary techniques that Kingston uses in her memoir |
| c. | a personal anecdote about the author’s experiences with childhood friends |
| d. | a brief biography of Kingston, including details about her childhood |

 19. Which sentence would provide the best introduction to the second paragraph?

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| --- | --- |
| a. | Kingston uses many literary techniques, such as vivid narration, in her memoir. |
| b. | Although Kingston uses a childlike voice in parts of her memoir, she is really an adult. |
| c. | Kingston’s use of realistic dialogue is more impressive than her use of narration. |
| d. | Kingston combines thoughtful narration with powerful, realistic dialogue. |

 20. Which type of sentence could the writer add after sentence 5 to strengthen the essay’s argument?

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| --- | --- |
| a. | a sentence that identifies the author’s favorite line from the memoir |
| b. | a sentence that quotes the most realistic line of dialogue from the memoir |
| c. | a sentence that explains how Kingston uses language to communicate with the reader |
| d. | a sentence that uses examples to illustrate the contrast between the dialogue and narration |

 21. Which sentence is least relevant to the author’s thesis?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| a. | 2 |
| b. | 4 |
| c. | 5 |
| d. | 6 |

**Writing Review: Edit Analysis of Nonfiction**

**Answer Section**

**MULTIPLE CHOICE**

 1. ANS: B PTS: 1

OBJ: Understand and analyze elements of literature from particular periods in American history.| Understand and analyze elements of fiction and nonfiction.| Understand and analyze author's purpose.| Understand and analyze the characteristics of autobiography.

 2. ANS: A PTS: 1

OBJ: Understand and analyze elements of literature from particular periods in American history.| Understand and analyze narrative accounts, including historical narratives.| Identify the writer's stance.

 3. ANS: D PTS: 1 OBJ: Identify the writer's stance.

 4. ANS: B PTS: 1 OBJ: Understand and analyze tone.| Identify the writer's stance.

 5. ANS: C PTS: 1 OBJ: Understand and analyze analogy.| Identify the writer's stance.

 6. ANS: A PTS: 1 OBJ: Understand and analyze imagery.

 7. ANS: D PTS: 1 OBJ: Understand and analyze imagery.

 8. ANS: B PTS: 1

OBJ: Understand and analyze the characteristics of a writer's style.| Understand and analyze tone.

 9. ANS: A PTS: 1

OBJ: Evaluate and analyze the philosophical, political, religious, ethical, and social influences of a historical period.

 10. ANS: C PTS: 1

OBJ: Evaluate and analyze the philosophical, political, religious, ethical, and social influences of a historical period.| Understand and analyze the characteristics of autobiography.| Identify the writer's stance.

 11. ANS: B PTS: 1

OBJ: Understand and analyze elements of literature from particular periods in American history.| Understand and analyze author's purpose.

 12. ANS: D PTS: 1 OBJ: Read for details.

 13. ANS: A PTS: 1

OBJ: Apply knowledge of word origins to determine the meaning of new words, and use those words accurately.

 14. ANS: B PTS: 1 OBJ: Use active reading strategies.| Read for details.

 15. ANS: A PTS: 1 OBJ: Understand and analyze tone.| Identify the writer's stance.

 16. ANS: C PTS: 1

OBJ: Use a variety of reading skills to understand literary and informational text.| Identify the writer's stance.| Use active reading strategies.

 17. ANS: A PTS: 1 OBJ: W1.2c

 18. ANS: D PTS: 1 OBJ: W1.2f

 19. ANS: D PTS: 1 OBJ: W1.12a

 20. ANS: D PTS: 1 OBJ: R2.3m | W1.4a

 21. ANS: A PTS: 1 OBJ: W1.5