

LESSON 2

Nonfiction Literature: *The Dark Child* (p. 18)

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

In *The Dark Child*, Camara Laye recounts his childhood and coming of age in French Guinea during the 1930s. This excerpt is from the final pages of the book. The protagonist has just been awarded a scholarship to continue his education in France. Now, he and his father must break the news to his mother that he is leaving home.

OBJECTIVE

Distinguish universal themes from details specific to time, place, and culture.

BEFORE READING

When Camara Laye was growing up in French Guinea, the government expected Guineans to thoroughly assimilate into French culture. Throughout most of his childhood, the protagonist in *The Dark Child* attends French schools. At 19, he receives a scholarship to continue his education in France. But this means that he must leave behind his close-knit family, friends, tribal customs, and the village where he grew up. This excerpt from *The Dark Child* contains several universal themes: Throughout history and all over the world, children come of age. Young adults feel ambivalent about leaving home, and parents grieve when children leave the nest. Have students look for these and other universal themes as they read.

DISCUSSION

1. As Laye and his father approach his mother, Laye's father says, "Believe me, even if we both go we'll be outnumbered." What does this tell us about Laye's mother? (*She is not going to like what they are about to tell her; once she has made up her mind, it will be difficult to bring her around to their side; she is formidable when angry.*)

2. Why does Laye's mother lash out at him and his father? (*She is devastated because her son is leaving home; her grief turns into anger, not only toward her son, but toward all those responsible for his leaving.*)

3. To whom is Laye's mother referring when she says "Those people are never satisfied. They want to have everything. As soon as they set eyes on something they want it for themselves."? (*She is referring to the French government, which had controlled much of West Africa since the 1890s.*)

4. Why is Laye's mother angry at the French? (*Had it not been for the French government, her son would be staying home instead of going to school in France.*)

5. How does Laye's father feel about his going to France? (*He is sad to see his son leave home, but he feels that the scholarship is too good an opportunity to turn down.*)

6. How does Laye feel after he boards the plane in Conakry? (*He is ambivalent; he feels torn apart by leaving his grieving family behind. But the métro map in his pocket reminds him of the adventure that awaits him.*)

EXTENSION

RESEARCH THE CUSTOMS AND CULTURE OF THE MALINKE PEOPLE. How does Malinke culture differ from that of France? How successful was the effort to assimilate Guineans into French culture? What is life in Guinea like today, nearly 50 years after the country declared independence from France?

RESEARCH THE LIFE OF CAMARA LAYE. Did he enjoy his time in France? Did he benefit from his French education? What happened to Laye after he returned to Guinea?

WRITE AN EXPOSITORY ESSAY. Discuss whether it was fair or reasonable for the French government to expect "total assimilation" in its African colonies?

LESSON 3

Master Class: *Drawing Pictures With Words* (p. 30)

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

In this excerpt from her poem "Morning Song," Sylvia Plath uses vivid imagery to describe the feelings of awe—and anxiety—a new mother has toward her infant.

OBJECTIVE

Read the poem and analyze the techniques Plath uses to create certain images.

BEFORE READING

Tell students they will read the excerpt twice. First, they will read the excerpt straight through without looking at the notes. They will then read stanza by stanza, using the notes to help them analyze the poem.

DISCUSSION

1. To whom is Plath speaking in "Morning Song"? (*She is addressing her newborn child.*)

2. How does the poet's tone suggest that this is her first child? (*She expresses wonderment toward this tiny new being, but there is a feeling of anxiety as well: "One cry, and I stumble from bed . . ."*)

3. Why is the phrase "Love set you going like a fat gold watch" particularly effective? (*It helps us picture the newborn baby coming to life with a sharp slap—just as a mechanical watch might begin ticking when tapped.*)

EXTENSION

READ FURTHER. Sylvia Plath wrote that "For me, poetry

continued on T4 ➡

LESSON 3

Master Class Cont'd.

is an evasion from the real job of writing prose.” In fact, Plath wrote a substantial amount of prose, including two unfinished novels and about 70 short stories. Most of these are unpublished; some of the manuscripts eventually disappeared. But Plath’s published prose includes several short stories and essays along with an autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963). Read one of these works and give an oral presentation to the rest of the class.

WRITE A POEM. Plath is known for her ability to turn mundane events into eloquent poetry. Examples include cooking dinner (“*Viciousness in the kitchen! The potatoes hiss . . .*”); cutting her finger in the kitchen (“*What a thrill—/My thumb instead of an onion. . .*”); caring for young children (“*And my baby a nail/Driven in./He shrieks in his grease. . .*”) In the style of Plath, write a poem about an ordinary task: taking out the garbage, feeding the dog, changing a tire, doing homework, etc.

THE ANSWERS

WORK SHEET ANSWERS p. T4

1. veracity
2. allusions
3. detracted
4. voracity
5. implying
6. invokes
7. distracted
8. illusions
9. inferring
10. evokes
11. pedal
12. compliment
13. petal
14. complement

WORK SHEET ANSWERS p. T5

1. proofreader’s; mistakes
2. It’s; your
3. blender; Tom and me; liquefy
4. losing; lie down
5. from; Aunt Gwen
6. accommodate
7. whether; their; inoculations
8. embarrassed; research
9. doesn’t; knuckle; chemistry
10. picnic; deceased; cemetery

STUDENT ISSUE:

Skill-Drill Answers

“What’s Going On Here?” p. 14

1. 1, 3, 5
2. 2, 3, 6, 7, 8
3. 4, 6, 8, 10
4. 4, 9, 10

“Cite It Right!” p. 17

Lien, A. *The Green Planet*. Marsville: Marshalls, 2040.

Leeve, I.B. “Is There Life on Earth?” *Cosmopolitan*
Aug. 2042: 33.

Wait, U. “First Earth Landing Postponed.” *The Mars Times* 12 Mar. 2043: 1.

“Carbon-based life-forms.” *Alien Profiles*. 2042.
University of Marsville. 11 Mar. 2043
<<http://www.umars.edu/aliens/carbonoids.html>>.

Skill-Drill Answers

“Universal Themes” p. 24

1. specific
2. universal
3. universal
4. specific
5. universal
6. specific
7. specific

“ACT Reading Test Practice” p. 28

1. B
2. D
3. B
4. A
5. A
6. C
7. C
8. A
9. C
10. D