**"Cross"**

*- Langston Hughes (1926)*  
  
My old man's a white old man

And my old mother's black.  
  
If ever I cursed my white old man  
  
I take my curses back.

If ever I cursed my black old mother

And wished she were in hell,

I'm sorry for that evil wish  
  
And now I wish her well

My old man died in a fine big house.

My ma died in a shack.  
  
I wonder where I'm going to die,  
  
Being neither white nor black?

**SUMMARY**

The narrator of the poem is a young mulatto, expressing his frustration at being both black and white but never fully belonging to either of the two races. He is not accepted by blacks because he is half white, and he is shunned by whites because he is half black. The historical significance of this is that, during the 1920s (in the U.S.), the cultural and racial segregation of African Americans and Caucasians were very defined and apparent. As such, the narrator is stuck in a sort of purgatory/gray area/limbo, for he is deprived of the chance to be immersed in either race due to racial pride. Thus, he is left in a state of confusion, suffering an identity crisis. He has no one with which he can identify.

As the narrator matures, he realizes that he can't blame or hate his parents for who he is. It doesn't make any sense. At the end of the day, he'll still be who he is, so why hate?

The last stanza emphasizes the poverty of the Blacks versus the wealth of the Whites during this time period. For, the narrator says that his father died in a big house while his mother died in a shack. He still doesn't know how to categorize himself in terms of identity, but he accepts the issue as it is. Once he decides which path to lead--life as a black man or life as a white man--then he'll know where he'll die.

**ANALYSIS:**

What makes this poem so masterful is its simplicity is an illusion. To the untrained eye, the poem may seem both short and simple, but the poem is anything but simple. It is rich is meaning--encompassing a plethora of connotations and duality.

**DENOTATION VS CONNOTATION**

**Denotation** is the literal, dictionary definition of a word.

**Connotation**, on the other hand, describes the associated and implied meanings (like emotional “baggage”) that are attached to most words.

For example, here is the denotation of the word "gun”- a weapon incorporating a metal tube from which bullets, shells, or other missiles are propelled by explosive force, typically making a characteristic loud, sharp noise.

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| *synonyms:* | firearm, pistol, revolver, rifle, shotgun, carbine, automatic, handgun, semiautomatic, machine gun, Uzi; More |

The word “gun” also has a negative connotation. Instead of associating guns with a positive thing like "protection," most people associate the word "gun" with death, blood, murder, etc. Connotation is what separates two identical words.

So, we all know that "house" and "home" are both places of dwelling and their definitions are almost entirely identical. However, what separates the two words are their meanings. When you say "house," it is impersonal and objective, just a building; but when you say "home," you associate things like family, warmth, safety, with it.

In "Cross," the word *cross* has many connotations. It can mean practically anything. Although it is not directly written in the poem, the word encompasses the entire essence of the poem.

The young narrator of the poem is:

* -multiracial, multicultural, mulatto, **cross-**breed.
* -His “hybrid”racial/cultural identity is perceived as a burden--a **cross to bear**. This brings about the image of the crucifix, making the narrator or subject of the poem somewhat of a Jesus figure. For, like Jesus, he suffers from constant persecution.
* -He is at a **cross-roads**. Which world does he fit into: white or black? He wonders about his future, his decisions.
* -He **makes a crossover**from his previous emotions. At first, the narrator admits that he was angry or **cross** at both of his parents, but, he later lets go of that hatred and forgives them both.

**OTHER CONNOTATIONS? Pair up and find at least one more connotation for the word “cross” that fits the context of the poem and write it below.**