

Harlem Literary Device

Writer: Langston Hughes | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Symbols

Dream : Hughes uses the symbol of a **“dream”** that is deferred (□□□□□□ □□). In this poem, he talks about the danger when the dream of racial equality is continuously delayed. He asks,

“What happens to a dream deferred?”

He asks: *“Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?”* The raisin, sore, rotten meat, and heavy load are all symbols of what happens when dreams are delayed to be fulfilled. In the end, the poet says that when a dream is delayed, it can explode.

“Or does it explode?”

It means it can cause an uprising or revolution. So, in this poem, “dream” symbolizes justice and equality.

Figures of Speech

Rhetorical Question

A rhetorical question is a figure of speech in which a question is asked for a reason other than to get an answer.

Example: **“What happens to a dream deferred?”**

This question makes readers think deeply. It asks what happens when a dream is delayed or not fulfilled, but it does not expect an answer.

Simile

A simile compares two different things using like or as.

Example: **“Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?”**

Here, the poet compares a postponed dream to a raisin drying in the sun. It means that if dreams are delayed for too long, they lose their freshness and energy, just like a grape

becomes dry and lifeless.

Anaphora

Anaphora means repeating the same word or phrase at the beginning of several lines or sentences.

Example: ***“Does it...?”***

The phrase *“Does it”* is repeated at the start of many lines. This repetition creates rhythm and emphasizes the poet’s question about what happens to unfulfilled dreams.

LxNotes