

“We Wear the Mask”

Part I: “We Wear the Mask”

Directions: Read the following poem and explicate and analyze it to answer the questions that follow.

“We Wear the Mask”

WE wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.
Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.
We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask!

-Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)

1. What is the message of Dunbar’s poem? How do you know?

2. What themes of the Harlem Renaissance do you see in this poem? Use the poem to back it up.

Part II: Your Mask?

Directions: Create a mask that you wear. Think about the face you present to the world and what you sometimes hide about yourself. What is your mask? You may use colors, words, etc, but be thoughtful.