

# **Reaching New Heights: Systematically Elevating Verbal Reasoning Through Poetry**





### The Harlem Renaissance (1910s through mid-1930s)

The Harlem Renaissance was a golden age for African American artists, writers and musicians. It was a time in which, for the first time in history, African American people were able to reveal their true talent and intellect. The only problem was that African American artists, poets, novelists and playwrights were only acknowledged within the community of African American people. They wanted their work to be esteemed by the world, not only their community. The voices of these artists brought pride in and control over how the African American experience was represented in American culture and set the stage for the Civil Rights Movement.



### The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement was a struggle for social justice that took place mainly during the 1950s and 1960s for African Americans to gain equal rights under the law in the United States.

### Modernist Literary Period (1910-1945)

- Strong reactions to established religious, political and social views
- Thematic, formal and stylistic innovation



### Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes differed from most of his predecessors among African American poets in that he addressed his poetry to the people, specifically to African American people. During the twenties when most American poets were turning inward, writing obscure and esoteric poetry to an ever-decreasing audience of readers, Hughes was turning outward, using language and themes, attitudes and ideas familiar to anyone who had the ability simply to read. Until the time of his death, he spread his message humorously - though always seriously - to audiences throughout the country, having read his poetry to more people (possibly) than any other American poet.





# Harlem

By Langston Hughes

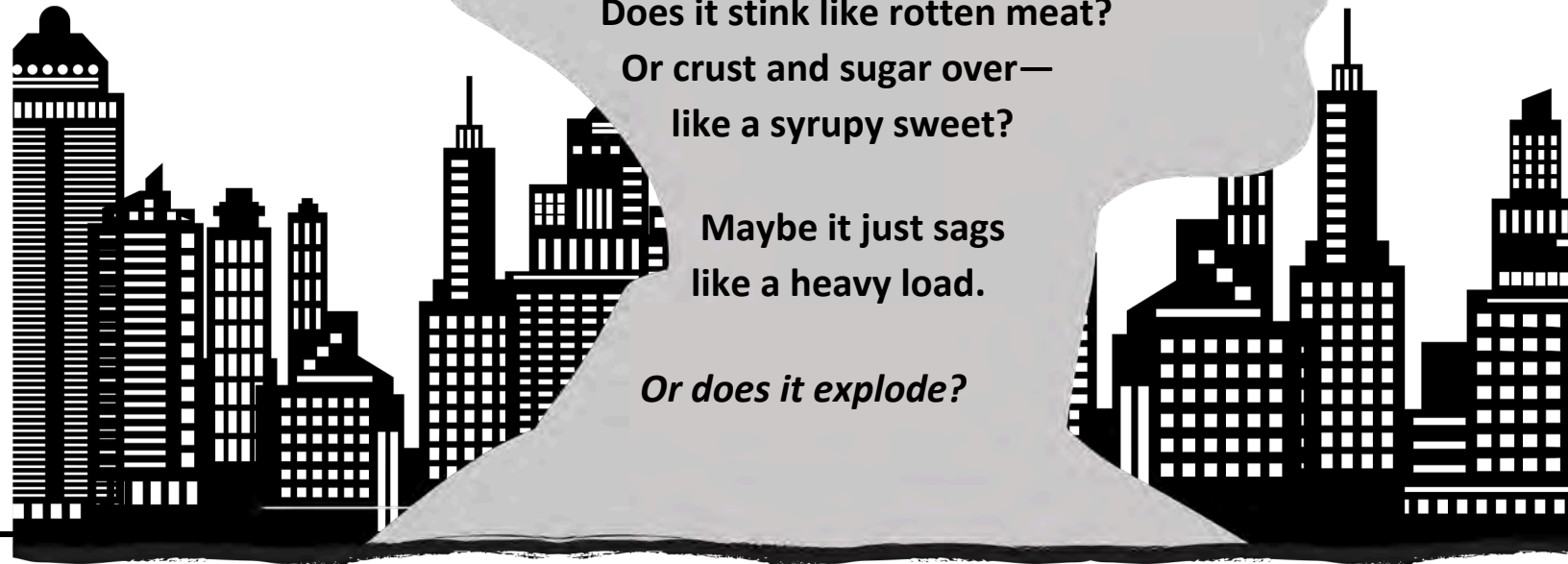
What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*



Be metacognitive. Consider what you are doing as a skilled reader to comprehend this text.



Define *deferred*.



How would it feel to have a dream deferred? Why?

Step 1

V.1.3

Define *fester*.

What causes a sore to fester?

Step 1

V.1.3

What do you notice about the form and elements of the poem?

Step 1

R.1.4

Notice the spaces between lines.

What impact does this have?

Step 1

R.1.4

How might the poem's meaning be impacted if the lines were all evenly spaced? Why?

Step 1

R.1.4

What do you notice about the final line?

What impact does this have?

Step 1

R.1.4

What is the connotation of the words *deferred*, *dry up*, *fester*, *sore*, *stink*, *rotten*, *crust*, *sags*, *heavy*, *load* and *explode*?

Step 1

V.1.3

What hashtags can you create to capture key ideas found in this poem? Explain.

Step 1

R.3.2



Paraphrase line 1 and lines  
9-11.


Step 1

R.3.2

The poem's title is "Harlem."  
Share what you know about  
Harlem.

Step 1

V.1.1

Langston Hughes   
begins this poem with a  
rhetorical question.

How does the first line  
impact the rest?

Step 2

R.3.1

This poem is a list of  
rhetorical questions.

How does this impact the  
reader?

Step 2

R.3.1

What other examples of  
figurative language or poetic  
elements do you notice?

What is the impact?

Step 2

R.3.1

How are lines 9-10 different  
from the rest?

How does this impact the  
flow/meaning of the poem?

Step 2

R.3.1

What image does the simile  
in lines 2-3 create?

Why do you think the poet  
included this simile?

Step 2

R.3.1

What image does the simile  
in lines 4-5 create?

Why do you think the poet  
included this simile?

Step 2

R.3.1



What image does the simile  
in line 6 create?

Why do you think the poet  
included this simile?

Step 2

R.3.1

What image does the simile  
in lines 7-8 create?

Why do you think the poet  
included this simile?

Step 2

R.3.1

What image does the simile  
in lines 9-10 create?

Why do you think the poet  
included this simile?

Step 2

R.3.1

What do you think Langston  
Hughes was suggesting with  
the last line?

Step 2

EE.3.1



What is one theme of the  
poem?

Explain.

Step 3

R.1.2

Who do you  
believe the speaker is?

Could it be someone else?

Why or why not?

Step 3

EE.3.1

In “Harlem,” how does  
Langston Hughes  
develop the themes?

Step 3

R.1.2

Evaluate the development  
of a theme from “Harlem.”

Step 3

R.1.2

What elements of the Modernist literary period are present in the poem?

Justify your reasoning.

Step 3

**R.1.4**

How does this poem reflect the feelings of society during the Harlem Renaissance?

Step 3

**R.1.4**

Discuss the influence of Langston Hughes' life as an African American man as it is revealed in this poem.

Step 3

**EE.3.1**

Does the speaker suggest that the deferral of dreams always leads to negative consequences? Explain.

Step 3

**R.1.4**

How does the exploration of deferred dreams highlight the tension between hope and despair?

Step 3

**R.3.1**

What symbols in the poem seem most strongly connected to the theme(s) of the poem? Explain.

Step 3

**R.1.2**

How did this poem  
add to your understanding  
of the Harlem Renaissance?



Step 4

**R.1.4**

What connections can you make between this poem and the Civil Rights Movement?

Step 4

**R.1.4**

Line 1 is a biblical allusion to Proverbs 13:12. Why do you think Langston Hughes chose to include it?

Step 4

**R.3.1**

Although “Harlem” reflects African American experiences, how do the themes apply universally?

Step 4

**1.2**

How does “Harlem” build upon or echo the messages of other Langston Hughes poems?

Step 4

**R.1.4**

Langston Hughes was well-known for performing his poems for others. Why do you think this is true?

Step 4

**EE.3.1**

How might this poem critique societal barriers to achieving personal goals?

Step 4

**EE.3.1**

In what ways do the themes of “Harlem” apply to the world today?

Step 4

**R.1.2**

What connections can you make between “Harlem” and other texts you’ve read?

Step 4

**EE.3.1**

This poem influenced Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech.

What parallels do you notice?

Step 4

**R.3.3**

Is there something hindering your comprehension? What strategy can you use?

EE.2.1

In what ways can you use your background knowledge with the text to make inferences?

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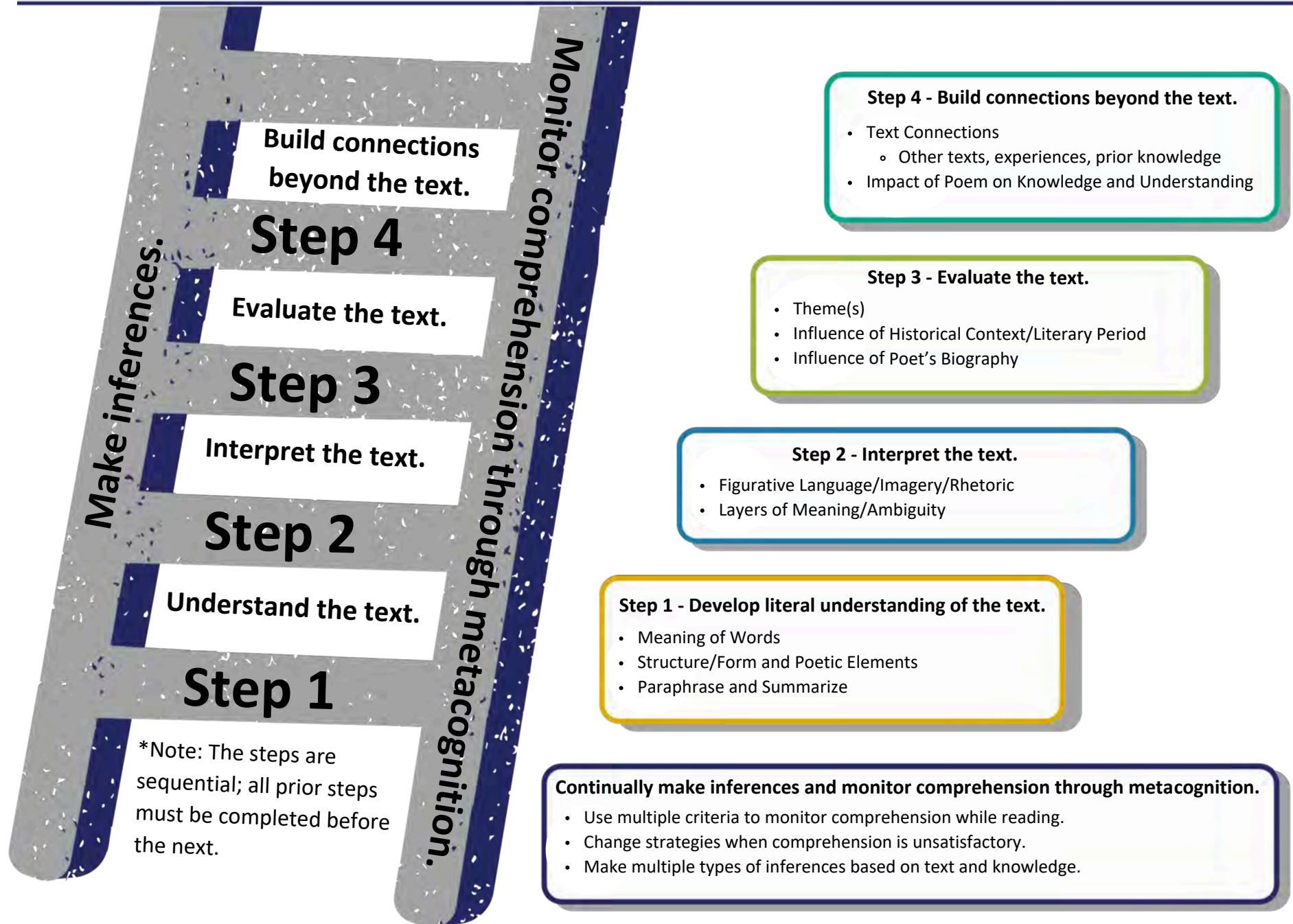
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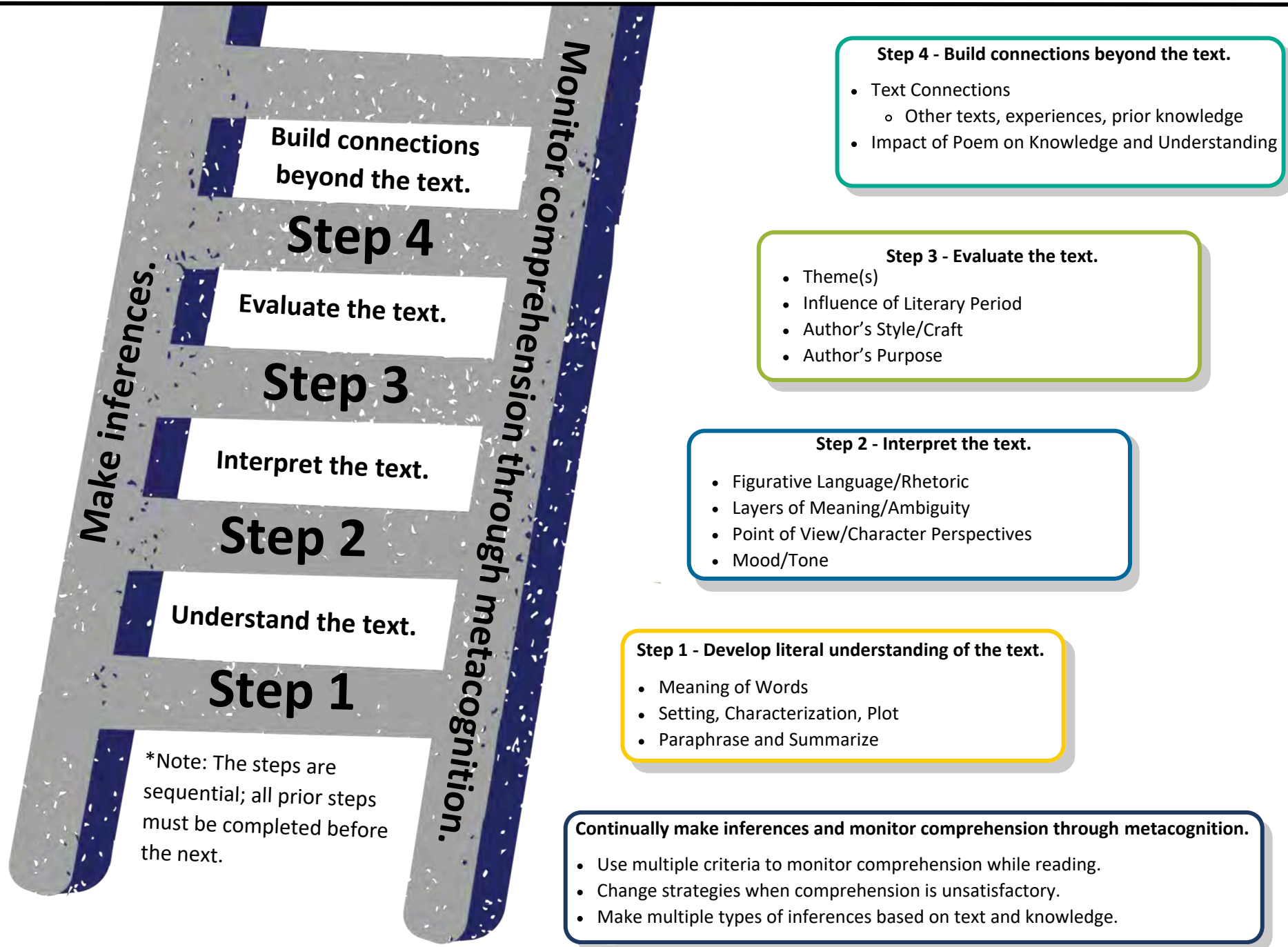
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EE.3.1

# Framework for Building Verbal Reasoning Skills - Poetry 6-12

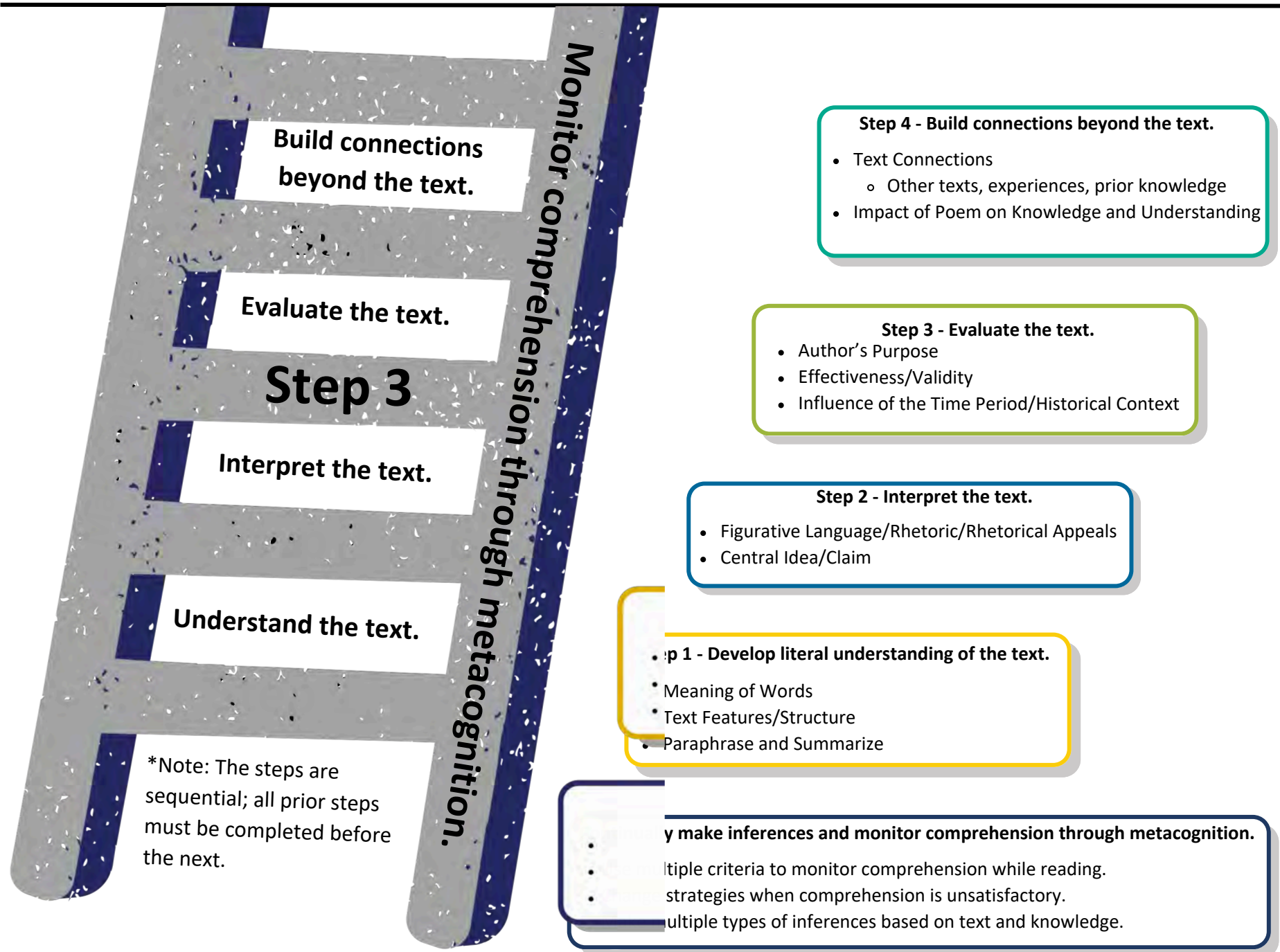


# Framework for Building Verbal Reasoning Skills - Prose 6-12





# Framework for Building Verbal Reasoning Skills - Informational Text 6-12









**Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night**  
**by: Dylan Thomas**

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked not lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.



# Background Information



## Dylan Thomas

Dylan Marlais Thomas was born on October 27, 1914, in Swansea, South Wales. His father, an English literature professor at the local grammar school, would often recite William Shakespeare, fortifying Thomas' love for the rhythmic ballads of Gerard Manley Hopkins, W. B. Yeats and Edgar Allan Poe.

## "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night"

"Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" was initially published in a literary journal in 1951. It later appeared in one of Thomas' own volumes the next year. It is a noticeably dark poem, concerning itself with the end of life and the personal struggle to hang onto that life for as long as possible. Fans of Dylan Thomas speculated that the poem was written for his ailing father, who passed away the year after the poem was first published. It is interesting (albeit very sad) to note that in the two years following the poem's publication, Dylan Thomas himself, along with his father, unborn son and three of his friends, would also pass away, giving the work a grim, real-world aspect of foreshadowing.

## Villanelle Structure

The first and third lines of the opening tercet are repeated alternately in the last lines of the succeeding stanzas. In the final stanza, the refrain serves as the poem's two concluding lines.

- Using capitals for the refrains and lowercase letters for the rhymes, the form could be expressed as:

A1 b A2 / a b A1 / a b A2 / a b A1 / a b A2 / a b A1 A2.

Rigid repetition is used to express some form of obsessive thought process.

## Literary Period

Unlike his contemporaries of the Modernist literary period, Dylan Thomas was not concerned with discussing social and intellectual issues in his writing. Instead, his writing exhibited intense lyricism and highly charged emotion, thus having more in common with the Romantic literary period.

