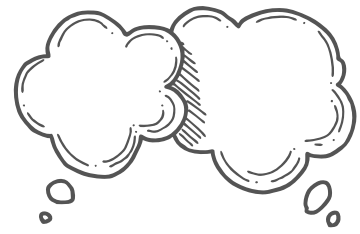


ON REFLECTION



Memorialising... Claude McKay

Claude McKay (1889-1948) was a Jamaican-born poet, novelist, and social activist. He is considered one of the major figures of the Harlem Renaissance. This was a cultural movement in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s that celebrated African-American culture and identity through the creativity of black writers, artists, musicians and intellectuals. The movement had a significant impact on American culture and society.

1

READ

McKay's experiences of racism and inequality in Jamaica, as well as his later experiences of racism in the United States, influenced much of his writing. One of his most famous poems is the sonnet 'If We Must Die'. It definitely isn't a traditional love poem like many sonnets!

Read the sonnet and talk about what emotions you think are expressed. Why do you think this poem became famous?

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!



2

TALK ABOUT IT

Claude's surname McKay is recognisably Scottish. Shockingly, this is because his grandparents were enslaved and given their owner's surname. Slavery had been abolished in Jamaica when Claude McKay was born but the legacy of slavery and colonialism continued to shape the country.

- Do you think Claude McKay would have felt connected to the Highlands?
- How do you think other McKays might feel about sharing the surname with Claude?

3

EXPLORE

There are many people with the surname McKay or Mackay living all over the world who trace their ancestry back to the Highlands. You could look for the Highlands, Jamaica and Harlem (New York) on a map of the world to see how far apart they are.

Wearing a tartan can be a way to feel connected to a clan and culture. Explore the Mackay tartan on the site.

4

TRY IT YOURSELF

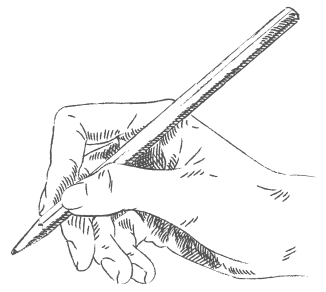
Become a social-activist writer! Create your own rhyming couplets about something you feel is unfair.



5

CREATE A COMMEMORATION

Use this page to plan your ideas.



Who do you want to commemorate?

Why do you want to remember what happened to them?

What could your design look like? What shapes or pictures could you include?

What message could you write?

