

## ***What do you want to be?***

What do you want to *be*?  
What do *you* want to be?  
*What* do you want to be?

Hey listen kid, you don't have to tell me—  
I'm just here to read some poetry.  
You can leave now if you want.  
You're completely free, you see.  
But, before you go, let me tell you  
I'm not here to tell you about birds and bees  
and trees  
and bananas and farmers and poetry things.  
This poem is a question,  
and I'm asking what you dream and feel and things.

You see, maybe you want to be famous.  
Maybe you want to be an astronaut and explore Uranus.  
Maybe you want to be the craziest stunt lady Hollywood's ever seen.  
Maybe you want to buy some flashy mansion  
and spend all your time keeping it clean.  
Maybe you're a dancer and Bollywood's more your scene.  
Maybe you're a natural,  
Maybe you're going to have work hard at it.  
Maybe you're a punk singer and you want to smash...it...up.  
Maybe you like nice stuff.  
Maybe to get it you're going to act all tough.  
Maybe you're going to be sweet.  
Maybe you're going to meet and greet.  
Maybe you just want to help people.  
Or maybe you want to be a success, like prove that you're the best.

Maybe you want to be a celebrity, or an important politician,  
shake the hands of the mayor.

Then again, maybe you just don't care.

Maybe you're in it for the money.

Now *that's* a sweet honey.

People don't find anything funny when they're racing to be rich.

Maybe you want to be surrounded by iPhones and quick fixes,

Maybe your heart tremors and twitches round diamond rings and bling.

Maybe you want to see all the precious things that eBay can bring,

Or wear so many jewels you look like a King.

Maybe you just want to sing in the shower

and that's what makes you feel free.

Maybe all you need is the moon and a tree to feel happy.

Maybe you're a natural.

Maybe you're a doctor, a tinker, a tailor, an architect of bad behaviour.

You could be a soldier or a spy.

You could be the kind of guy who wonders why

the world is just as it is

Or how the plane can stay in the sky.

Maybe you're an expert at stopping a baby crying.

Maybe you'll be found frying a rich man's breakfast

in a gourmet restaurant.

Maybe you're a killer chef or an amazing painter.

You don't have to know now;

you can find out later what it is you really want to be.

Because maybe you just want to see the world.

Maybe you want to travel around and live out of a backpack.

Maybe you want to be a goth, wearing nothing but black

'cos maybe being blue just ain't you.

Maybe you just have to find out what's true and what's a lie in the

newspaper.

Maybe you'd make a kiss-ass journalist.

Then again maybe all that writing would turn you mentalist.

Maybe you want to make your own zombie movies,  
spray ketchup all over your mate's face for fake blood,  
Maybe you want to be a dirt biker all covered in mud,  
or a rescue woman saving people in a flood.  
Maybe you want to be a boxer, landing punches with a thud.  
Maybe you want to do very little,  
live life quietly up a mountain someplace,  
stay up all night staring into space.  
Maybe you want to raise a family.  
Maybe you want to devote your life to a god.  
Maybe you want to live in a caravan on the sea, serving cod and chips.  
Maybe you'll be eternally swell if you can just kiss a sweet pair of lips

Whatever your dream, I'm just here to remind you that you can be  
whatever you want to be and you can have *anything*, you see.

Now if you're like me you're going to want it all for free.

But like me and like lots of other people like me,

in the end you're going to see

that if you want to be what you want to be

then you are going to have believe

and work real hard.

Unless you just want to be a nobody, which is real easy.

But don't worry, 'cos this crazy game is not a race,

and it's not up to me or school or TV to tell you your place.

We don't know your dream, or even what you really mean

when you say what you want to be.

It's up to you.

You've got to decide for yourself you see.

Now, tell me - what do you want to be?

*Wilf Merttens*

*Unit 1 Day 1*

## **Author Profile of Wilf Merttens**



Wilf Merttens is a writer, storyteller and poet from Bristol. He has his own website and runs creative workshops all over the UK. He does a lot of work in schools, telling stories and helping children to develop their skills as writers and performers. In 2009 he was judged Young Storyteller of the Year.

This is how Wilf's website describes his work:

*“Wilf Merttens harvests the little clumps of story that collect in sock drawers and obscure chat rooms. He mixes them up in a jar until they make a dark and childish syrup. It's damned hot down the myth mine and the other miners grope in the dark to steal his pasty, and it's dusty, and when he is born again, rolling and coughing from the earth's mouth, a formidable old tale has built up in his throat and must be worked up and out before it gnarls his insides. He was once Young Storyteller of the Year but now he's not. He is still pretty young though. He tells poems, he brings legends, he jumps about.”*

Unit 1 Day 1

\_\_\_\_\_ **wants to be...**

Job title

Job description

Reasons for choice

\_\_\_\_\_ **wants to be...**

Job title

Job description

Reasons for choice

*Unit 1 Day 1*

*Job Cards*

Professional  
cuddler

Snake venom  
milker

Iceberg mover

Dog surfing  
instructor

Professional  
queuer

Pet food taster

Fortune cookie  
writer

Luxury hotel  
bed-warmer

## ***Author Profile of Langston Hughes***

***1902 - 1967***



*Langston Hughes was born in the state of Missouri in America in 1902. Several of his ancestors had been slaves and he himself suffered a lot of prejudice from people who felt black people were second-class citizens.*

*Many of his later stories and poems were about not only how cruel it is to treat other people badly just because of the colour of their skin, but also about how important it is to strive for a kinder, better life.*

*Whilst still a child he developed a love of poetry and dreamt of becoming a writer. On leaving school however he had to take a series of menial jobs, including working as a sailor on a merchant ship.*

*In the 1930s Hughes moved to a part of New York called Harlem where a lot of very creative African-Americans lived and worked. Here, as part of what people called the 'Harlem Renaissance' (the word means 'new start' or 'new beginning'), he became famous as a poet, playwright and novelist.*

*Unit 1 Day 2*

## ***Hold Fast to Dreams***

Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go  
Life is a barren field  
Frozen with snow.

Langston Hughes,  
*The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*,  
Vintage, 1995

*Unit 1 Day 2*



## Metaphors

A **metaphor** is a comparison in which a place, person or thing is described as if it was another entirely different but similar thing.

*Ben is a greedy pig.*

Ben is not actually a pig - he's a boy - but the comparison to a greedy pig is very effective in telling us that Ben obviously tucks into his food like a farm animal at meal times!

**Metaphors** very often contain the verbs **is** or **are**, **was** or **were**.

*The stars **were** jewels in the night sky.*

*Life **is** a journey.*

*The children in my class **are** a dream.*

*He **was** a big baby, moaning about the weather like that.*

**Metaphors** are different to **similes**

**Similes** describe people, places, situations or things by comparing them to something that they are like.

**Similes** either contain the word **like** or the phrase **as...as...**

*Ben ate **like** a snuffling pig.*

*Ben was **as** greedy **as** a pig.*

*In **Hold Fast to Dreams**, Langston Hughes uses two **metaphors** to describe a life without dreams as if it is something else.*

a broken-winged bird

a barren field

Because Hughes wants to make us see that life without dreams is broken and bleak, he employs descriptive metaphors that speak of broken and bleak things or situations.

What *other* images would do this?

How about something abandoned or deserted? Something poisoned or shattered?

Can we add to this ideas bank? You need to think of things and situations that are broken, damaged, incomplete, unfinished or in some other way unsatisfying and unrewarding—just as a life without dreams would be.

*Unit 1 Day 2*

## Planning Frame

Verbs for dreams ending

Metaphors for a life without dreams

*Unit 1 Day 2*

# Ideas Sheet

## *Possible verbs*

wither decay bleed break shatter rupture implode  
collapse break apart shrivel fracture crack fade  
empty dry up blanch ossify calcify darken close  
shut down evaporate disperse scatter are extinguished

## *Possible metaphors*

### *Something...*

deserted poisoned abandoned shuttered broken  
cracked homeless leafless sunless empty splintered  
unloved cheerless unfinished lost smashed snuffed  
out frozen buried

*Unit 1 Day 2*

## *A Dream Deferred (Harlem)*

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?

Langston Hughes,  
*The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*,  
Vintage, 1995

*Unit 1 Day 2*

## ***Mother to Son***

Well, son, I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it,  
And splinters,  
And boards torn up,  
And places with no carpet on the floor—  
Bare.  
But all the time  
I've been a-climbin' on,  
And reachin' landin's,  
And turnin' corners,  
And sometimes goin' in the dark  
Where there ain't been no light.  
So boy, don't you turn back.  
Don't you set down on the steps  
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.  
Don't you fall now—  
For I've still goin', honey,  
I've still climbin',  
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Langston Hughes,  
*The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*,  
Vintage, 1995

*Unit 1 Day 4*

## *Keep On Keeping On*

We've all had times when the going gets tough  
The smooth ride suddenly feels bumpy and rough  
The good times are gone, it's all rather gruff  
You let out a sigh and exclaim—"I've had enough"

We are all entitled at times, to gripe and to moan  
What's happened to my life, you say with a groan?  
My backpack seems weighed down by a very big stone  
How do I move away from this miserable zone?

When a curved ball hits you, through a trick or a con  
Remember the good days, when the sun always shone  
Go forward with the belief that you already have won  
The best advice I can give is to keep on—keeping on

Michael Sage

*Unit 1 Day 4*

## Questions about Keep On Keeping On

1. What does *gruff* (line 3) mean?
2. There is no sentence-end punctuation at the finish of the line in verse 1 which closes, ...*I've had enough*. Which sentence-end punctuation do you think might work best here? Why do you think that?
3. Quote the line in the poem that suggests that, from time to time, everybody has the right to moan about things that are frustrating them.
4. In verse 2 the poet talks of a backpack *weighed down by a very big stone*. What do you think the poet means by this?
5. Can you give an example of the kind of thing that the poet might be suggesting is *a very big stone*?
6. Would you say the overall mood of the poem is optimistic or pessimistic? Why do you think that?
7. In your own words, say what you think Michael Sage's main message in the poem is.

Unit 1 Day 4

## ***Don't Quit***

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,  
When the funds are low and debts are high,  
And you want to smile but have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,  
As everyone of us sometimes learns,  
And many a failure turns about,  
When he might have won if he'd stuck it out,  
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,  
You might succeed with another blow.

Often the struggler has given up,  
When he might have captured the victor's cup.  
And he learned too late, when the night slipped down,  
How close he was to the golden crown,

Success is failure turned inside out,  
The silver tint of clouds of doubt,  
And you never can tell how close you are,  
It may be near when it seems afar,  
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,  
It's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit.

Anon,

<http://www.all-creatures.org/poetry/dontquit.html>

*Unit 1 Day 4*



## ***Questions about Don't Quit***

1. The poet uses the verb *trudging* on line 2: can you suggest a synonym for this verb?
2. Quote the two lines in verse 2 which suggest that, when faced with a problem, you should never give up just because nothing seems to be happening, as you may find that with your very next try, things completely change.
3. Judging from the poem, which of these words best sums up the way the poet thinks we should be in the face of problems—*reckless*, *undaunted* or *despondent*? What in the poem tells you this?
4. Explain in your own words what the poet means by the lines: *Often the struggler has given up,  
When he might have captured the victor's cup.*
5. Imagine a person or a group of people to whom this poem would be really good advice and say why you think it might help them.
6. No-one is sure who wrote *Don't Quit*. What kind of person do you think they would have been and why?

*Unit 1 Day 4*

**WARNING – Use your judgement as to whether to use this poem or not.**

## ***Still I Rise***

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise

Up from a past that's rooted in pain

I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

Maya Angelou,  
*The Complete Collected Poems of Maya  
Angelou*  
Virago, 1995

Unit 1 Day 4

## ***Questions about Still I Rise***

1. What does *sassiness* (line 1, verse 2) mean? Suggest two synonyms for sassiness.
2. Find and copy an example of a rhetorical question from the poem. Why do you think the author uses rhetorical questions at several points in the poem?
3. Quote the lines of the poem that suggest that the narrator will not be pushed down even if people talk about them in derogatory ways or look at them as if they don't really matter.
4. Maya Angelou uses similes at several points in the poem. Copy out two of these similes.
5. You have learned that Maya Angelou was a black American writer who was the descendant of slaves. Find two different lines in the poem that might have told you this even if you did not know it before.
6. Who do you think the poem is addressed to—who might the 'you' that the narrator refers to be?
7. In your own words suggest what you believe Maya Angelou wanted readers of her poem to feel when they read it.

*Unit 1 Day 4*

***Johann Goethe***  
***1749-1832***



***Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it  
now! Boldness has genius, power and magic in it!***

*Unit 1 Day 4*