

Title: **Of History and Hope**

Poem, (20th Century)

Author(s): Miller Williams

American Poet (1930 - 2006)

Source: *The Ways We Touch*: Miller Williams. University of Illinois Press, 1997. p69.

We have memorized America,
how it was born and who we have been and where.
In ceremonies and silence we say the words,
telling the stories, singing the old songs.
We like the places they take us. Mostly we do.
The great and all the anonymous dead are there.
We know the sound of all the sounds we brought.
The rich taste of it is on our tongues.
But where are we going to be, and why, and who?
The disenfranchised dead want to know.
We mean to be the people we meant to be,
to keep on going where we meant to go.
But how do we fashion the future? Who can say how
except in the minds of those who will call it Now?
The children. The children. And how does our garden grow?
With waving hands -- oh, rarely in a row --
and flowering faces. And brambles, that we can no longer allow.
Who were many people coming together
cannot become one people falling apart.
Who dreamed for every child an even chance
cannot let luck alone turn doorknobs or not.
Whose law was never so much of the hand as the head
cannot let chaos make its way to the heart.
Who have seen learning struggle from teacher to child
cannot let ignorance spread itself like rot.
~~We~~ know what we have done and what we have said,
and how we have grown, degree by slow degree,
believing ourselves toward all we have tried to become --
just and compassionate, equal, able, and free.
All this in the hands of children, eyes already set
on a land we never can visit -- it isn't there yet --
but looking through their eyes, we can see
what our long gift to them may come to be.
If we can truly remember, they will not forget.

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"Of History and Hope" by Miller Williams

(To be used as part of the larger unit on inaugural poetry.)

RL.9-10.4

After carefully reading the "Of History and Hope," explain why Miller Williams uses the word "memorized" in the first line. How does his choice of this word help the reader understand the first stanza?

RL.9-10.4

Compare Miller Williams' use of "remember" in the last line of his poem to the use of "memorized" in the first line. What does he mean by "*truly* remember" as opposed to "memorized"?

RL.9-10.5

After carefully reading the third stanza of the poem, analyze the textual structure Miller Williams uses to present his audience with the decision before them.

RL.9-10.4

Carefully read the first two lines of the last stanza and explain what Miller Williams means by "it isn't there yet."

RL.9-10.5

Analyze the organizational pattern that Miller Williams uses in his poem "Of History and Hope." Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.5

What is "our long gift to them" that Miller Williams mentions in the last stanza?

W.9-10.2, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.5

Analyze the challenge laid down in the last line of Miller Williams' inaugural poem "Of History and Hope" and explain how its meaning is conveyed and supported in the body of the poem.

W.9-10.2, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.5

Analyze the challenge laid down in the last line of Miller Williams' inaugural poem "Of History and Hope" and explain how its meaning is conveyed and supported in the body of the poem.

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Answers may vary

W.9-10.2, RL.9-10.2, RI.9-10.4, RI.9-10.5

Analyze the challenge laid down in the last line of Miller Williams' inaugural poem "Of History and Hope" and explain how its meaning is conveyed and supported in the body of the poem.

Miller Williams challenges the audience that "if we can truly remember, they will not forget."

Throughout the poem, the poet establishes the need of the current generation ("we") to remember the ideals of the past.

The poem also establishes the "long gift" that honoring the ideals of the past will secure for the future generations ("they").

"On the Pulse of the Morning" by Maya Angelou
"Of History and Hope" by Miller Williams
"Praise Song for the Day" by Elizabeth Alexander

← Optional

Determine the common theme of the three inaugural poems and analyze its development through the poets' use of similar structures over the course of the poems.

RL.2

RL.5

W.2