CHAPTER 6 ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY
Understanding African Poetry

LISTENING TO ANCESTORS

Many Africans strive to follow the codes of conduct that their ancestors left behind. They believe that ancestors have the power to bring disaster to a family or even a whole village if they disapprove of their descendants’ behavior. Thus, beliefs about ancestors lead to civic order. These beliefs also put death in a positive light.

The poem below shows the traditional African's view of death as a passage to a higher plane of influence.

Directions  Study the poem, then answer the questions that follow, using a separate sheet of paper if necessary.

Listen more to things
Than to words that are said.
The water's voice sings
And the flame cries
And the wind that brings
The woods to sighs
Is the breathing of the dead.
Those who are dead have never gone away.
They are in the waters that sleep.
They are in the crowds, they are in the homestead.
The dead are never dead

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I. What natural phenomenon does the poet describe in the phrase “grass with tears to shed”?

II. Do you think Africans' beliefs in ancestors made them receptive to missionaries' teachings about souls and eternal life? Explain.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. Determining Relevance  Would an African city dweller be more or less likely than an African villager to abandon the traditional belief in the power of ancestors? Explain your answer.
Be, be, 'fore we came to this country
We were kings and queens, never porch monkeys
There was empires in Africa called Kush
Timbuktu, where every race came to get books
To learn from black teachers who taught Greeks and Romans
Asian Arabs and gave them gold when
Gold was converted to money it all changed
Money then became empowerment for Europeans
The Persian military invaded
They heard about the gold, the teachings, and everything sacred
Africa was almost robbed naked
Slavery was money, so they began making slave ships
Egypt was the place that Alexander the Great went
He was so shocked at the mountains with black faces
Shot up they nose to impose what basically
Still goes on today, you see?
If the truth is told, the youth can grow
Then learn to survive until they gain control
Nobody says you have to be gangstas, hoes
Read more learn more, change the globe
Ghetto children, do your thing
Hold your head up, little man, you're a king
Young Princess when you get your wedding ring
Your man is saying "She's my queen"