Hard Times, Two Voices

Compare imagined 1933 voices, then read and compare two Romantic-period poets.

8.T.PM.1.b "Compare and contrast the treatment of a common theme by different writers within a time period. (I)"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details in each poem that reveal hardship or hope, then circle one word or phrase in each poem that shows the speaker's attitude toward the future. Use your marks to compare how the writers treat a shared struggle.

Two 1930s Voices

1 During the Great Depression, many Americans faced lost jobs, empty cupboards, and uncertain futures. The two original poems below imagine young writers living in 1933. Both speakers notice the strain of daily life, but each chooses different images and a different response. As you read, pay attention to what the speakers value, what they fear, and where they look for strength. The poems are not historical documents, but their setting reflects real conditions of the period.

2 Ruth Allen, "Morning Window," 1933 Before sunrise, I tie my shoes with string. Mother saves the last flour for supper. Still, a thin gold line climbs over the mill roofs. I carry Father's worn lunch pail to the job office, though he cannot use it today. The pail knocks my knee like a small drum. Step by step, I follow its beat. Somewhere beyond the closed gates, a door will open, and I will be ready.

3 Caleb Ortiz, "Brick Street," 1933 The landlord's notice flaps on our door, louder than the wind. On Brick Street, children count cracked windows while men wait beside the relief line. I do not trust the bright posters that promise better days. A promise is paper until hands make it real. Tonight, I will join my neighbors at the council hall. We will bring our notices, our questions, and our voices. If the city has locked every gate, we will build a key together.

AUTHENTIC PERIOD PAIR: ROMANTIC POETRY (1789 AND 1807)

Writer, work and origin	Read the poem or excerpt
Blake, 1789	**Laughing Song** William Blake, Songs of Innocence (1789). Public-domain transcription: Gutenberg ebook 574; date: The Met, object 17.10.15. When the green woods laugh with the voice of joy, And the dimpling stream runs laughing by; When the air does laugh with our merry wit, And the green hill laughs with the noise of it; when the meadows laugh with lively green, And the grasshopper laughs in the merry scene, When Mary and Susan and Emily With their sweet round mouths sing "Ha, ha he!" When the painted birds laugh in the shade, Where our table with cherries and nuts is spread: Come live, and be merry, and join with me, To sing the sweet chorus of "Ha, ha, he!"
Wordsworth, 1807	**I wandered lonely as a Cloud** William Wordsworth, Poems, in Two Volumes, volume 2 (1807). First and final stanzas; Gutenberg ebook 8824. I wandered lonely as a Cloud That floats on high o'er Vales and Hills, When all at once I saw a crowd A host of dancing Daffodills; Along the Lake, beneath the trees, Ten thousand dancing in the breeze. [Middle stanza omitted.] For oft when on my couch I lie In vacant or in pensive mood, They flash upon that inward eye Which is the bliss of solitude, And then my heart with pleasure fills, And dances with the Daffodils.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What shared struggle do both writers explore? State the theme in your own words.

2. Compare one image Ruth uses with one image Caleb uses. What does each image show about hardship or hope?

3. How does Ruth's response to hardship differ from Caleb's response? Use one detail from each poem.

4. How does each writer's word choice create a different tone toward the future?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Actually read the two supplied Romantic-period selections by Blake and Wordsworth. First write three comparison sentences: identify their shared theme, compare a specific image from each, and explain a difference in how each speaker experiences that theme. Cite the writers by name. Then complete the six-sentence fictional 1933 poem or journal task: a third young person faces hardship differently from Ruth and Caleb, includes two concrete images, and explains that contrast in sentence six. The 1933 voices are a creative scaffold, not authentic period documents. Use another sheet as needed.

ANSWER KEY

Hard Times, Two Voices

GRADE 8 · 8.T.PM.1.b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details in each poem that reveal hardship or hope, then circle one word or phrase in each poem that shows the speaker's attitude toward the future. Use your marks to compare how the writers treat a shared struggle. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What shared struggle do both writers explore? State the theme in your own words.	**Both writers explore facing economic hardship during the Great Depression while seeking a better future.**
2	Compare one image Ruth uses with one image Caleb uses. What does each image show about hardship or hope?	**Ruth's gold line and opening door suggest hope and opportunity. Caleb's landlord notice, cracked windows, and locked gate show harsh conditions and barriers that must be changed.**
3	How does Ruth's response to hardship differ from Caleb's response? Use one detail from each poem.	**Ruth responds through personal persistence and readiness, carrying the lunch pail to the job office. Caleb responds through collective action, joining neighbors at the council hall.**
4	How does each writer's word choice create a different tone toward the future?	**Ruth's words such as "gold," "beat," and "open" create a hopeful, determined tone. Caleb's words such as "notice," "cracked," and "locked" create a frustrated but defiant tone.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Period-pair comparison: Blake and Wordsworth both explore joy connected to nature. Blake's laughing woods and shared table make joy a present invitation to a group, while Wordsworth's dancing daffodils later return to his "inward eye." The speakers differ because Blake invites others to join now, whereas Wordsworth finds renewed pleasure in remembered nature during solitude.

Fictional 1933 creative response:
In 1933, I keep a notebook beside the kitchen stove. When the coal bucket is empty, I sketch the blue flame we wish could burn. At the library, I trade my drawings for old magazines and learn how other towns have solved hard problems. I cannot open a factory gate, and I cannot force the city to listen. But I can gather ideas, teach my little brother to read, and plan for the day our family needs a new start. Unlike Ruth's patient hope and Caleb's public protest, my speaker responds to hardship by learning and preparing.

Accept theme statements about enduring Depression-era hardship, hope, or working toward a better future. Students may choose different valid details, as long as they accurately compare Ruth's personal determination with Caleb's collective, action-focused response. For the added authentic pair, check actual reading and three sentences with a shared theme, accurate images from both writers, and a supported difference. Accept other grounded interpretations. Blake's 1789 work and Wordsworth's 1807 work belong to the Romantic period; do not call them Depression-era texts. The original six-sentence creation remains separate and fictional. Preserve the exact historical spelling and intentional poem lines.