

That as well. the
above passage is a



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That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too: Once I redemption neither sought nor knew. Some view our sable race with scornful eye, " Their colour is a diabolic dye.

" Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain, May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train. (Wheatley, 12; Lauter, 575) Literature is a discipline that has been used for centuries as a way of expressing people's feelings as well as an avenue for passing across messages about important issues. Artists use their pieces of writing to communicate to the general public and bring about change concerning various issues that affect the society. This essay is thus a response paper to Wheatley's On Being Brought From Africa to America. The essay explains the meaning of Wheatley's short poem and addresses its contributions in American literature as well.

The above passage is a poem by Phillis Wheatley that talks about a slave shipped from her native land to another continent. The poet implies that the subject's homeland practiced paganism and the exposure to a new setting made her aware of Christianity. The subject finds something positive in her slavery; Christianity, which she and the other slaves embrace. Religion was a major theme in most works of art written by African-American writers during the era of slave trade in the 18th and 19th century in America. They dwelled on Christianity because it was a form of solace that gave them hope. The excerpt goes on to say that many people, especially Christians, view the black man as being sinful hence uses this to scorn them. The poet implies that the White American judges the black man solely on the color of his skin and nothing else.

To the White, the color of the black man prevents him from doing good including being intelligent and even being creative. But the poet reminds them that though they might be black, they also have a chance of getting in Heaven. She also implies that being black-skinned is not a hindrance to greatness.

This poem reflects on the woes of the black people who were brought into America from their motherland, Africa, to work as slaves. The phrases “ mercy brought me” and “ on being brought” are ironic in that they imply that Africans moved to America on their own free will, which was never the case (Wheatley, 12). But in the real sense women, men, and children were kidnapped and forced into ships where most of them died due to hunger and sickness as they were shipped off to America to be slaves. Wheatley does not want to come out as a slavery critic, that is why it seems as though she is thanking ‘ mercy’ and not the slave traders for bringing her from her pagan land.

‘ Mercy’ is a symbol of a higher power that saved her from heathenism. Readers could also conclude that Wheatley does not want to give power to the slave traders by not crediting them for her redemption from paganism to them. The white American, especially the ones who practiced Christianity, judge the black man harshly due to the fact that he did not practice Christianity hence they labeled him a pagan or a heathen.

The phrase “ view our sable race with scornful eye” in the above passage is purposely used to incite the reader to take a critical approach to slavery, which considers both the negative and the positive sides of the story. This is

because, sable is desirable and valuable. Hence, the black man's race is valuable and the color of his skin makes him desirable. But in the next line in her poem, Wheatley uses the phrase " diabolic die" contrasting the previous phrase (p. 12). This phrase reflects the perception white men had for black men then and in the present world.

Emphasis is put on the black man's weaknesses and little regard is put on the positive. Africa, the cradle of the black man, is viewed as the home of ' evil' and nothing good is expected to come out of there. The poet disapproves this notion saying that, " Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain, May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train" (p. 12).

Wheatley uses this line to point out the fact that God does not discriminate, therefore, ' the angelic train' will consist of both the white man and the black man (p. 12). Towards the end, she reminds the readers of the message in the poem by using the term ' remember' which is a command to simply imply " lest you forget." On Being Brought From Africa to America brings out Wheatley as a preacher. She dwells on Christianity and how those against slaves should act especially if they are Christians. The major themes are slavery, Christianity and redemption.

Redemption in that, the subject is saved from her pagan way of life.

Wheatley's work is powerful based on its content. The African-American's place in the society has been and still is a sensitive issue in America. Her work may be an expression of her own experiences. She proved that Africans could be educated and produce quality and creative work just like the white

people. During the era of slavery, the white Americans did not believe that an African, let alone a woman, could write poems.

In this regard, before she could publish her work, Wheatley was forced to legally defend the authenticity of her literary ability, which worked in her favor when the court concluded that she did indeed write those poems. To the contrary, publishers in Boston, all of who were whites, refused to publish her text forcing her to publish her work in London (Gates, p. 5). This goes to show just how much the white Americans were rigid and did not want to accept the fact that the black Americans were just as good as them in whatever field. The poem can be said to be a reflection of Wheatley's personal experiences. Wheatley was bought by John and Susanna Wheatley and brought to America in 1761 where she worked as a house-help for the Wheatley family in Boston. She was forced to take up the name Wheatley as she now belonged to them. This shows that not only were the Africans deprived of their freedom, but also their sense of identity.

Even though she was a slave, her slavery had some positive impact on her life as her mistress insisted on educating her hence developing her skills in poetry. Despite this, she was still aware of the fact that she was a slave and was only allowed to write because of the kind-heartedness of her master (Gates, p. 5). Wheatley's poem can be placed alongside Thomas Paine's Common Sense. 'Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent – of at least one eighth part of the habitable globe.

'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now' (Paine, 1; Lauter, 455) Paine is referring to America's politics in the above quote. He says that the issue of prospering politics is not the sole responsibility of one city or country, but it should be the concern of the whole continent. The quote symbolizes unity among all humankind. That is, it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that countries are governed in a manner that leads to prosperity. The success resulting from prospering politics or the struggle towards achieving prospering politics cannot be realized in a day or a year; it takes time, probably years. His arguments were based majorly on the idea of American independence from England.

He questioned the English monarchy and the English Parliament, thus the need for America to gain independence. His political style of writing makes this quote powerful as he was more concerned with the issue of independence. Paine's work contributed greatly to the discussion about independence in the public debate; a topic which had initially been considered 'taboo' to discuss in the public arena.

The main theme in Paine's writing was independence and his ideas contributed to American literature in such a way that branded him the founding father of the United States. In his book, Paine urges Americans to fight for their independence from the British. He did not agree with the British government and their views so he did not understand why Americans should remain under their rule hence advocated for independence. Likewise, Wheatley indirectly attacked the white American through her work during a

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time that it was a taboo to do so. While Paine uses his literature to campaign for the independence of America, Wheatley uses her literature to advocate for salvation of African American. Wheatley wanted African Americans to be given an equal opportunity to Christianity. Views on African American literature have greatly changed since the days of slavery and this form of literature has become an integral part of American literature. Wheatley's work was considered to be of quality according to the standards of literature.

Her work is often cited to point out that Africans are human and equal to the white man. Wheatley's work negates the notion that Africans are intellectually inferior. This should encourage African-American students that they too can make it in whatever field they choose to specialize in.

The poem also acts like a lens through which students can examine an author's work. By reading Wheatley's work, students are able to come across important literary devices, which when their effect on literary work is understood goes a long way to equip students with vital skills of literature that can be used to critically evaluate other pieces of work. In this poem, there is the use of irony and symbolism as explained in this discussion.

These elements assist one in comprehending any piece of work. Being able to understand the deeper message in Wheatley's poem enables students to appreciate her, not only as an African-American poet or a woman poet, but also as a pioneer of African-American literature.

She combines poetic devices and her life experiences to create a unique voice within the American literary tradition. Hence, she has represented American literature by talking about issues that have shaped present day

America. This poem ties into some of the themes and concepts discussed in class about American literature including: independence from various forms of enslavement, issues like women recognition in various sectors and the place of the black man in American society. In conclusion, Phillis Wheatley's work of art has greatly contributed to American literature as explained in the above discussion. Her involvement in literature as a black woman has enhanced and changed how the black man and woman are viewed especially in the literary field, which was dominated by white males. Her poem suggests to the reader that every negative thing has a positive side as it is through slavery that she came to learn about Christianity.

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