'harlem' by langston hughes and 'altar' by marilyn chin essay sample

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?

This essay will investigate two poems, 'Harlem' by Langston Hughes and ' Altar' by Marilyn Chin and analyzes the topics, the themes and figurative languages, especially in the use of figurative language. The aim of this paper is to compare the two poems and find the similarity of them which is topic and the differences of them which are theme and the use of figurative language. Both poems ' Harlem' and ' Altar' have a similar topic that is about American dream. The readers can find that from the following examples.

In the ' Harlem', the first stanza ' what happens to a dream deferred?' the reader can know that Hughes is interested in a dream in his poem. Also, from the word ' deferred', we can find something negative, which is able to be explained that Hughes's dream can't be finished so it has to be deferred. The same example could be found in last stanza ' Or does it explode?' after '

explode', there is nothing. So the dream or goal is maybe just an ideal but couldn't be done. Then, link the title of the poem ' Harlem' which is a small town in New York, we can get the answer that is the topic of this poem is about a real American dream.

A comparison of the poems shows a different use of figurative language in relation to the American dream. Firstly, Hughes uses ' similes' to describe the American dream. The examples of word use ' like', ' as' and ' than', these are ' similes' in the use of figurative language. By the second stanza, ' Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?' a raisin in the sun is really a metaphor for his dream also dries up and sounds hopeless. Also, ' Does it stink like rotten meat?', the fresh meat already has some smelling, if it turns to bad and becomes rotten meat.