

## POETRY WORKSHEET

### Life Mask

Jackie Kay

#### TASKS

1. What tone can you identify in the poem? Find three quotations that support this tone.

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2. Find three sensory images in the poem, that explore the way in which Kay uses imagery to paint a vivid picture of the arrival of Spring.

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3. The poem's title provides a strange new perspective on the content of the poem. What do you think Kay intended when she called this poem 'Life Mask'?

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4. This poem was first published as the final poem in a 2005 poetry book of the same name. If you have time, read the full collection *Life Mask*, paying close attention to the other 'Mask' poems, including 'Mid Life Mask', 'The Mask of the Martyrs', 'African Masks' and 'Moon Mask'.

- How do these poems help you to understand this one on a deeper level?
- How are masks connected with the themes of identity and self expression?
- What comments do you think Kay is making about the way that we use masks in society?

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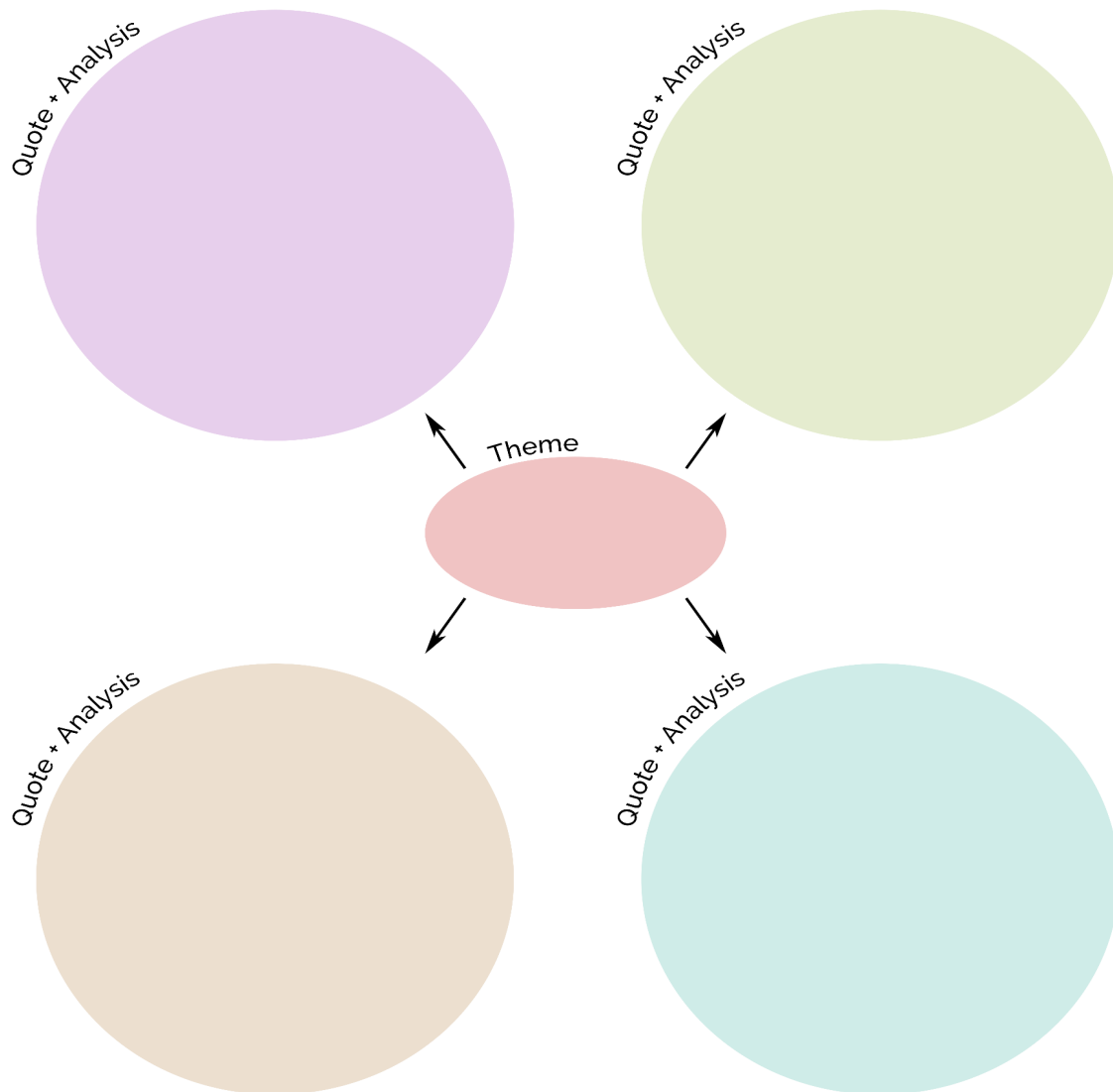
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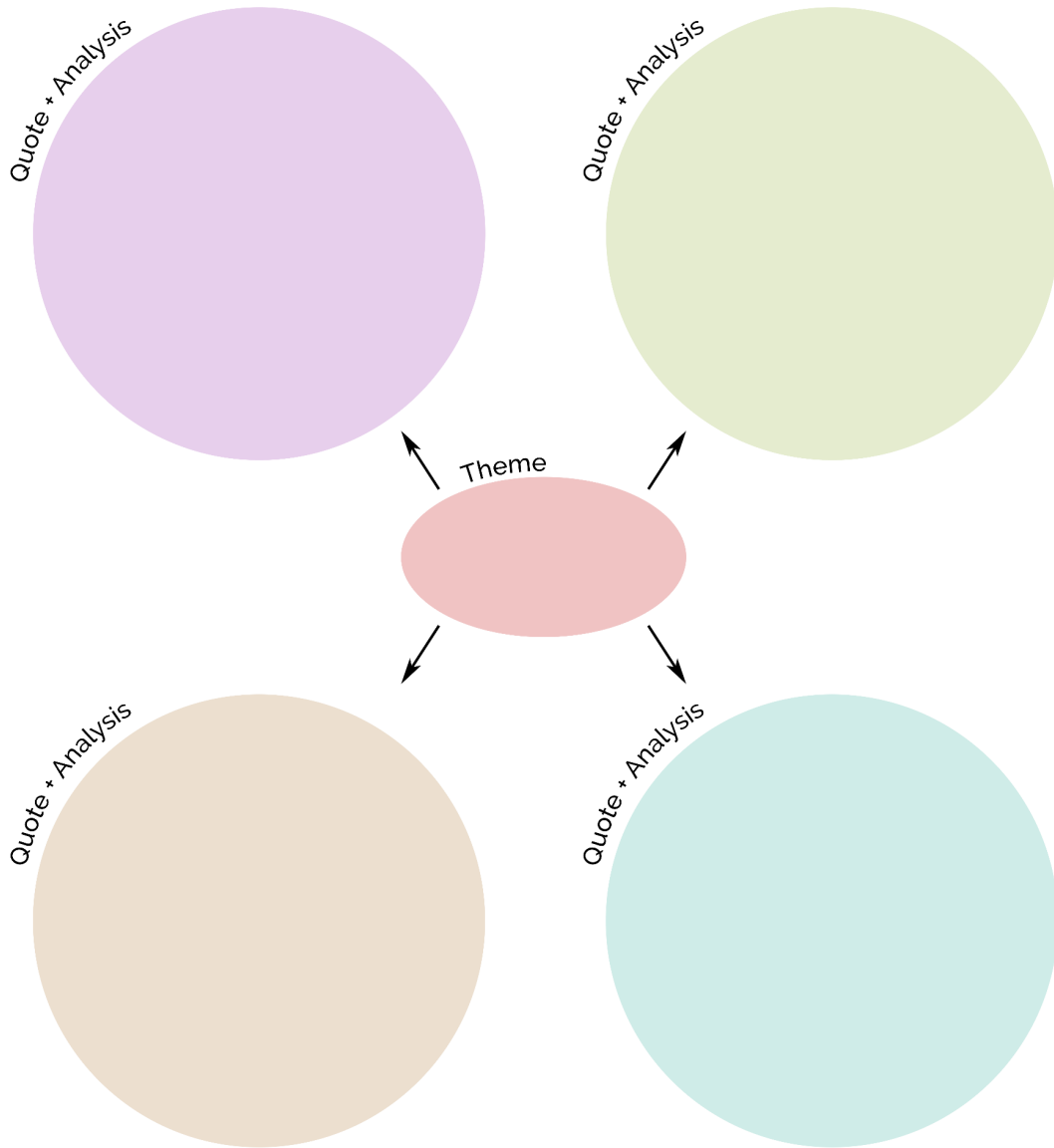
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<p><b>5a. Pick two of these themes,</b> then make a mind map for each by adding four separate quotations from the story that relates to them. Make short notes of analysis, explaining how and why each one relates to your theme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hope</li><li>• Suffering and Despair</li><li>• Survival</li><li>• Nature</li><li>• Healing</li><li>• Love</li><li>• Loss</li><li>• Masks</li><li>• Identity</li><li>• Individuality</li><li>• Seasons</li></ul>
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**5b. What, in your opinion, is the author’s final message or statement about each theme that you chose?**

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## EXERCISES

### 1. Identify and explore the poem's use of symbols.

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**2. Discuss the personality and character of the speaker in the poem.**

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**3. Read Philip Larkin's 'The Trees'. Compare and contrast the attitudes in Larkin's poem, with Kay's 'Life Mask'.**

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**4. Explore your own attitudes to nature, specifically the season of Spring. Write a couple of descriptive paragraphs, or your own short poem, about the feeling of Spring that arrives after Winter. Use imagery in your piece to precisely capture the sensory experience of the season.**

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## PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the way in which the poem explores the idea of fighting the endless challenges of life.
2. How does Kay use the motifs of nature and seasonal cycles symbolically in her poem 'Life Mask'?
3. Explore Kay's attitudes to identity and self-expression, as presented in 'Life Mask' and one other poem from your collection.