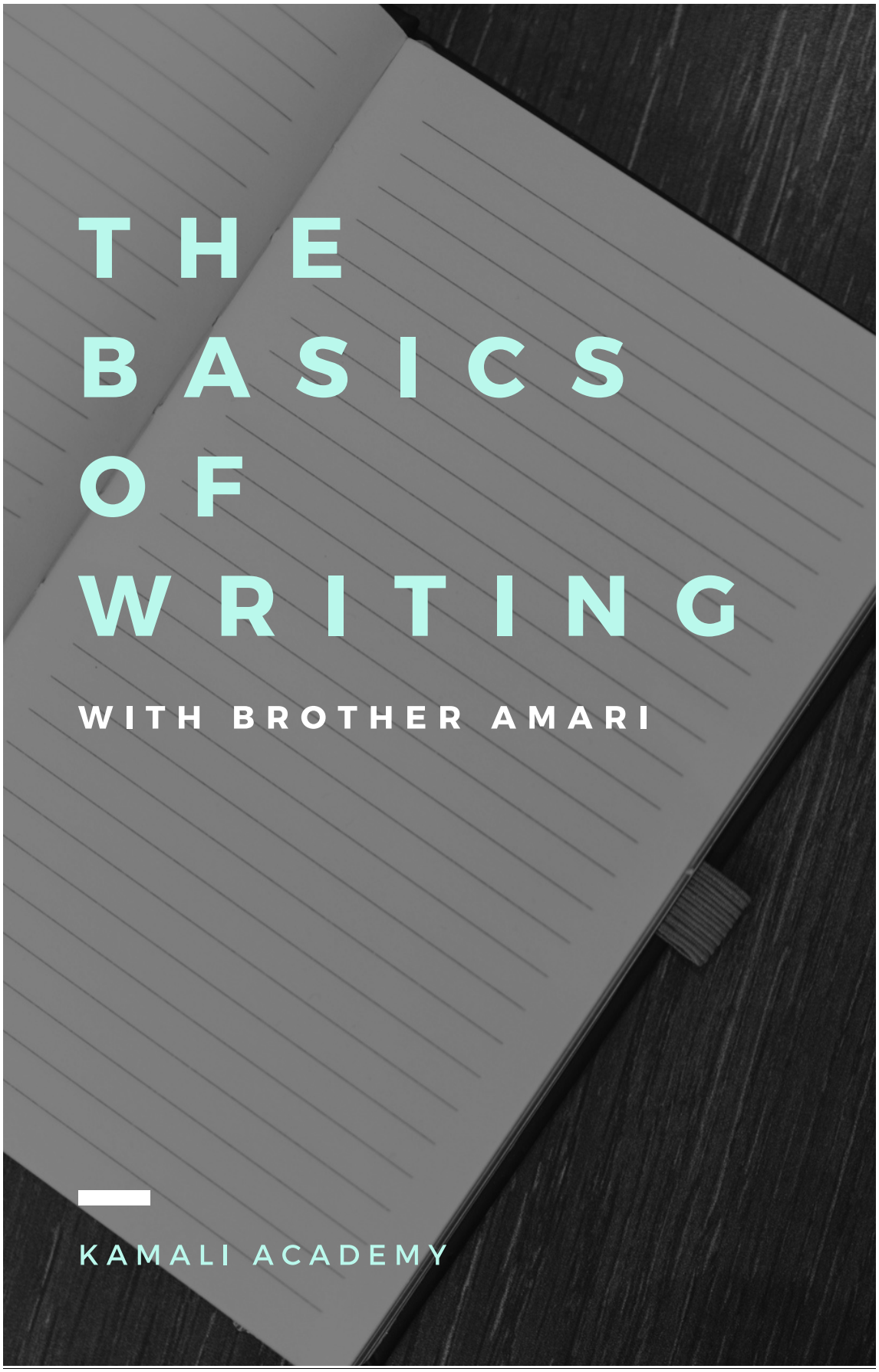
THE
BASICS
OF
WRITING
WITH BROTHER AMARI
KAMALI ACADEMY

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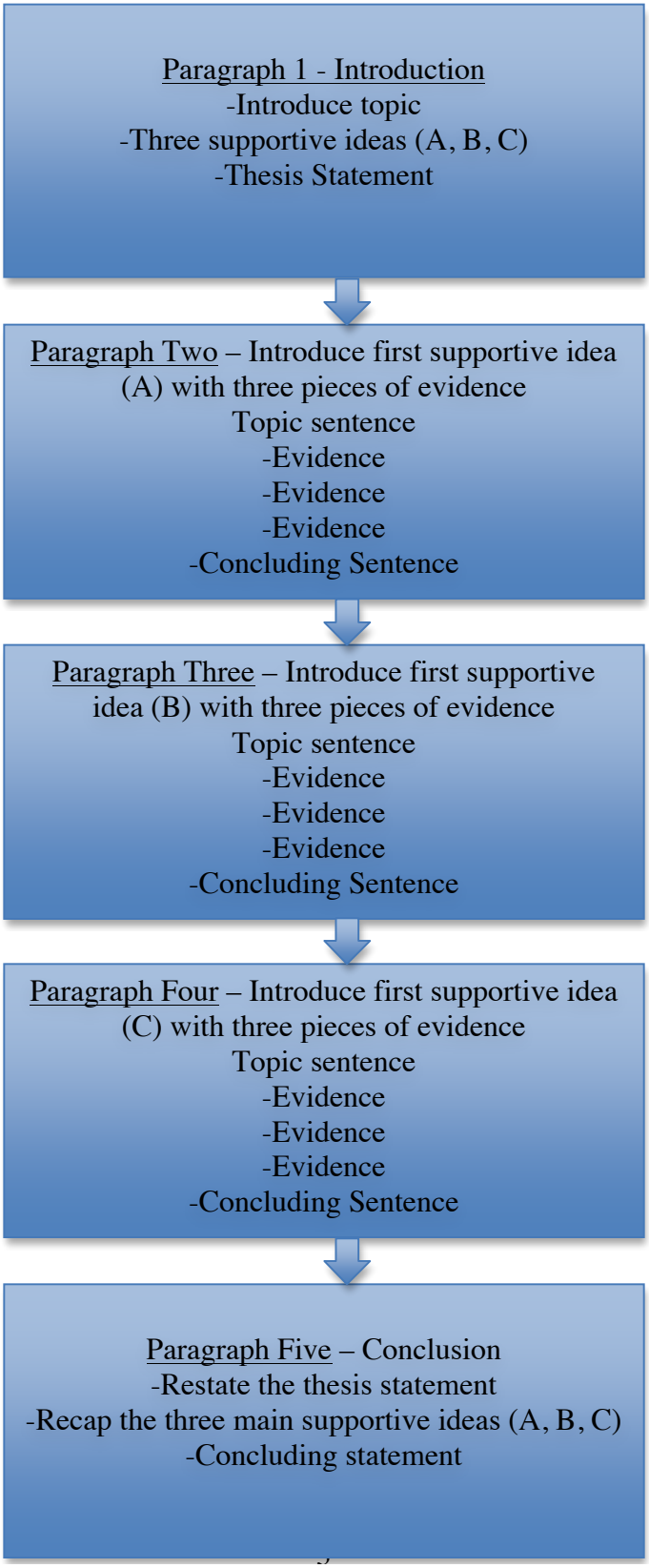
5-Paragraph Essays



Expository Essay

Black is beautiful: three simple words that say so much. It is an affirmation, a declaration, and a phrase of emancipation. In this essay, I will explain why Black is beautiful by focusing on three areas: our strength and resilience, our style, and our diversity. Ultimately, I argue that the beauty of Blackness is an indisputable fact.

We are a strong and resilient people. Despite centuries of continuing exploitation, we continue to maintain and develop our culture. The Trans-Atlantic Trade in Human Beings carried Black people to every corner of the globe. Once there, we continued our traditions, fought against oppression, and worked to adjust to new environments. Today, even in the midst of a constant attack on our ways of life, we continue to struggle for our freedom through music, art, politics, and spirituality.

We pursue our freedom with so much style. Black people make ordinary things extraordinary. Our words take on new meanings. Our clothes come to life. Our music takes over our whole bodies. All over the world, Black culture sets the trends for popular culture. We are artists. We understand that what you do is not as important as how you do it. No matter the opposition, we live our lives according to a code of style.

Beyond having style, Black people are the most diverse people on the planet. We come from many places, speak many languages, and bear many shades and complexions, yet still identify as Black. We acknowledge our differences while understanding that we are connected by something larger: a heritage rooted in Africa. These differences enhance our beauty by demonstrating each individual's unique approach to this broader identity.

The beauty of Blackness is undeniable. We are a strong and resilient people who have withstood the trials and tribulations of time. We have approached life with so much style that the world has forever been altered and left to ask us how we do it. Instead of folding, we multiplied, taking on diverse forms and shapes, yet still holding on to our central identity. Our beauty is not to make us conceited. Rather, it is to serve as a source of pride and a motivation for working together to free ourselves from oppression. There is so much ugliness in the world, and the conditions of our people are by no means pretty. But one thing that no one can deny is that Black surely is beautiful.

Narrative Essay

We are often taught that confidence is a virtue. It provides us firm ground to stand upon in this world of haters and naysayers. "Be confident in everything you do," they tell us. "For if you aren't, people will walk all over you." What they don't tell us, however, is that there is such a thing as being *over*-confident, more commonly known as arrogance. This arrogance, it turns out, can be as dangerous as having no confidence at all. I had to learn the hard way.

I was never a good basketball player. In fact, I was always downright terrible. My handle was so lose I often lost control, never knew which foot to leap off of for a lay up, and my shooting form had me looking like a one armed Praying Mantis. It didn't matter that there was a basketball court right across the street from my house. I never got to get on. The old guys were there in the morning, and the big kids were there in the afternoon. Whenever my peers were on the court, they wouldn't pick me. In fact, they would rather play with one less man than have me on their team.

The only team that would let me on was over at St. Mary's—and they let *everybody* on. It's true. There were 27 kids on the team. Beyond that, they had a policy of letting every kid play at least one play per game. That's exactly what I saw all season: one play. Towards the end of the year, though, I saw a little more action. It was a rainy away game. As we drove out there, sheets of water covered the windshield. On top of that, it was colder than a Popsicle in the back of the freezer. Only 7 players showed up, so I saw much more time than one play. In fact, I played so much I actually scored two baskets! Oh, you couldn't tell me nothin'! I was so happy that, when I got home, I ran to the park to prepare for the next night's home game. Since it was raining, there was no one on the court. Just me, out there cold and wet, but determined to be the next Michael Jordan.

The next night, we were at St. Mary's—home court. This was *my* house. All these people in the stands must have heard about my superb performance from the night before and come to see me. I wanted to build suspense, so I didn't even warm up. I just stayed in the locker room letting the crowd's anticipation grow. Finally, it was time. I had done so well the day before I was moved to starting position. I was ready. I slowly took of my warm ups, removing my sunshades last. Sunshades! As I walked onto the court, I think I even heard someone whisper, "that's him." A slight smile graced my lips. The whistle blew and the game began. The first play of the game, the Point Guard passed me the ball. Two men rushed me. They must have heard about me, too. I was boxed in between half-court and the sidelines, searching for options. Defenders' arms flailed like the inside of a car wash. The ball was burning in my hands. Then, suddenly, the lights went out and a lone spotlight lit up the basket. I closed my eyes and threw.

I was never a good basketball player. Years of being overlooked left me with a severe lack of confidence. Then, one fateful afternoon, I scored 4 points and shot to the mountaintop of arrogance. It didn't last long. I closed my eyes and threw that ball from half-court. It didn't get anywhere near the basket. The buzzer sounded and I was taken out of the game. Had I been a

little more humble, taken my “success” with a little more stride, things may have developed differently. Instead, my arrogance brought me crashing down. Until this day, I am still a terrible basketball player.

Descriptive Essay

I love being Black. I love Black people. We have made an art out of living. We turn the good, the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful into a tapestry of life that paints the whole world red, black, and green. I love being Black. If I had to describe one place that really captures the feeling of Blackness, it would be the African Street Festival in Brooklyn, New York, every 4th of July weekend. The warm weather, Black love, and sense of freedom is enough to hold me over for the entire year.

We love warm weather, and without fail, Mama Africa shares some of that homeland heat with the festival goers. I'm talking hot: sweat on your brow hot; sun snooping over your shoulder and asking for a sip of your fruit smoothie hot! People treat each other like the long-lost family that we are as our melanin is activated in the open field of Commodore Barry Park. Greetings, handshakes, head nods and hugs hailing halos of kinky hair blown out into afros, twisted into locks, or braided into corn-rows. This is exactly what Roy Ayers was talking about when he said, "Everybody loves the sunshine/Folks get brown in the sunshine."

The heat seems to just pull us closer together and remind us who our kinfolk are. There is a love in the air that grabs you up like a warm hug from Grandma. It is precious. In these times when we are confronted with hatred and denial, the festival provides an abundance of love. It's in the smiles that stretch from ear to ear. You hear it in the children laughing like they will be young forever. You can smell it in the ackee and saltfish, the greens and yams, and the incense burning somewhere or everywhere. You can see it in the shades and shades and shades of our people: from butterscotch and caramel to mahogany, chocolate, and ebony. All of us are there, loving ourselves and loving each other for it.

This love, this community, is enough to give us our very own taste of freedom. Here, people ask about the well-being of each other's children. We make new friends. We challenge people to games of chess, buy clothing that reflects our culture, and support Black businesses. We debate philosophies of Black liberation: self-defense, non-violence, socialism, Pan-Africanism. While everyone has their own ideas and opinions, we all agree on these three things: freedom is a must, it is inevitable, and it will feel like this.

Thousands of people gather for the African Street Festival. It is truly one of the best experiences I have each year. It strengthens my love for Black people and affirms my mission to spend my life working for us. At the festival we eat, we laugh, we dance, we sing, we shop, we rejoice. But, most of all, we plan to meet each other again next year in the same place to experience, if nothing more, one weekend of warmth, love, and freedom.

Persuasive Essay

From the time we are young, we are often told that a successful life is one filled with money, big houses, and fame. Friends and family are important, but must always take a back seat to these material things. "You can help them later," they tell us. But it seems as if the richer people get, the further they get away from their community and the lonelier they become. This essay argues that true success is having a loving family and strong community. As such, all of us should use our skills and talents to help our people and fulfill our purpose.

In our culture, we understand that each of us comes to this life with a set of skills and a larger purpose. Our objective in life is to use our skills to fulfill our purpose. As African people, that purpose is always inherently linked to the well-being of our people. When we use our skills to help our people, we strengthen our communities. Money without purpose is useless. Fame without purpose is dangerous. Our goal is to discover our purpose and fulfill it by any means necessary.

There are those who will argue that the best way to help our people is to get into positions of power first. While this may sound like a good argument, it is largely unfounded. How you get somewhere is generally how you stay there. Unfortunately, we often find that in order for Black individuals to get into "positions of power," those individuals must sacrifice and betray their communities. In order to stay in those positions, these individuals must continue doing the things that got them there: distancing themselves from other Black people. This alienation prevents them from fulfilling their purpose and thus they live culturally unfulfilled lives.

Success is found in the quality of people you have around you, not in the quantity of money you have in the bank. There is a story about a man who vowed to become a millionaire. He spent his days working to gain as much money as he could. For years, he toiled away, ignoring phone calls from his siblings and denying invitations from his friends. After a long time, he finally checked his bank account to confirm that he had in fact become a millionaire. He called his siblings to celebrate, but they had changed their numbers. He invited his friends out for a glorious meal on him, but they said they had other things to do. In the end, the only thing he had was his money. It was then that he realized that his wealth, every last penny of it, was worthless.

Contrary to popular opinion, there are many things that money can't buy. Money can't buy love, happiness, or peace. I am certainly not arguing that money, big houses, or fame are bad things in and of themselves, and we should avoid them at all costs. Rather, I am saying that they should not be our priority. Our focus should always be discovering and fulfilling our purpose by using our skills—whatever they may be—to help our people. If you do this, you will live a meaningful and successful life.

✧ ✧ ✧

Alice Walker
(b. 1944)

Everyday Use

Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning epistolary novel *The Color Purple* (1982) and its 1985 film version have made her the most famous black woman writer in contemporary America, perhaps the most widely read of any American woman of color. A native of Eatonton, Georgia, Walker was the eighth child of an impoverished farm couple. She attended Spelman College in Atlanta and Sarah Lawrence College in New York on scholarships, graduating in 1965. Walker began her literary career as a poet, eventually publishing six volumes of poetry. Her short story collections and novels, including *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), which takes as its subject the controversial practice of female circumcision among African tribes, continue to reach large audiences and have solidified her reputation as one of the major figures in contemporary literature. Walker has coined the term "womanist" to stand for the black feminist concerns of much of her fiction. "Everyday Use," a story from the early 1970s, is simultaneously a satisfying piece of realistic social commentary and a subtly satirical variation on the ancient fable of the city mouse and the country mouse.

For your grandmama

I will wait for her in the yard that Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon. A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny,

irregular grooves anyone can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house.

2 Maggie will be nervous until after her sister goes: she will stand hopelessly in corners homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs, eyeing her sister with a mixture of envy and awe. She thinks her sister has held life always in the palm of one hand, that "no" is a word the world never learned to say to her.

3 You've no doubt seen those TV shows where the child who has "made it" is confronted, as a surprise, by her own mother and father, tottering in weakly from backstage. (A pleasant surprise, of course: What would they do if parent and child came on the show only to curse out and insult each other?) On TV mother and child embrace and smile into each other's faces. Sometimes the mother and father weep, the child wraps them in her arms and leans across the table to tell how she would not have made it without their help. I have seen these programs.

4 Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program of this sort. Out of a dark and soft-seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people. There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have. Then we are on the stage and Dee is embracing me with tears in her eyes. She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she has told me once that she thinks orchids are tacky flowers.

5 In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing. I can eat pork liver cooked over the open fire minutes after it comes steaming from the hog. One winter I knocked a bull calf straight in the brain between the eyes with a sledge hammer and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall. But of course all this does not show on television. I am the way my daughter would want me to be: a hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake. My hair glistens in the hot bright lights. Johnny Carson has much to do to keep up with my quick and witty tongue.

6 But that is a mistake. I know even before I wake up. Who ever knew a Johnson with a quick tongue? Who can even imagine me looking a strange white man in the eye? It seems to me I have talked to them always with one foot raised in flight, with my head turned in whichever way is farthest from them. Dee, though. She would always look anyone in the eye. Hesitation was no part of her nature.

7 "How do I look, Mama?" Maggie says, showing just enough of her thin body enveloped in pink skirt and red blouse for me to know she's there, almost hidden by the door.

8 "Come out into the yard," I say.

9 Have you ever seen a lame animal, perhaps a dog run over by some careless person rich enough to own a car, sidle up to someone who is ignorant enough to be kind to him? That is the way my Maggie walks. She has been like this, chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle, ever since the fire that burned the other house to the ground.

10 Dee is lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and a fuller figure. She's a woman now, though sometimes I forget. How long ago was it that the other house burned? Ten, twelve years? Sometimes I can still hear the flames and feel Maggie's arms sticking to me, her hair smoking and her dress falling off her in little black papery flakes. Her eyes seemed stretched open, blazed open by the flames reflected in them. And Dee. I see her standing off under the sweet gum tree she used to dig gum out of; a look of concentration on her face as she watched the last dingy gray board of the house fall in toward the red-hot brick chimney. Why don't you do a dance around the ashes? I'd wanted to ask her. She had hated the house that much.

11 I used to think she hated Maggie, too. But that was before we raised the money, the church and me, to send her to Augusta to school. She used to read to us without pity; forcing words, lies, other folks' habits, whole lives upon us two, sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice. She washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn't necessarily need to know. Pressed us to her with the serious way she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand.

12 Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy dress to wear to her graduation from high school; black pumps to match a green suit she'd made from an old suit somebody gave me. She was determined to stare down any disaster in her efforts. Her eyelids would not flicker for minutes at a time. Often I fought off the temptation to shake her. At sixteen she had a style of her own: and knew what style was.

13 I never had an education myself. After second grade the school was closed down. Don't ask me why: in 1927 colored asked fewer questions than they do now. Sometimes Maggie reads to me. She stumbles along good-naturedly but can't see well. She knows she is not bright. Like good looks and money, quickness passed her by. She will marry John Thomas (who has mossy teeth in an earnest face) and then I'll be free to sit here and I guess just sing church songs to myself. Although I never was a good singer. Never could carry a tune. I was always better at a man's job. I used to love to milk till I was hoofed in the side

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in '49. Cows are soothing and slow and don't bother you, unless you try to milk them the wrong way.

14 I have deliberately turned my back on the house. It is three rooms, just like the one that burned, except the roof is tin; they don't make shingle roofs any more. There are no real windows, just some holes cut in the sides, like the portholes in a ship, but not round and not square, with rawhide holding the shutters up on the outside. This house is in a pasture, too, like the other one. No doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it down. She wrote me once that no matter where we "choose" to live, she will manage to come see us. But she will never bring her friends. Maggie and I thought about this and Maggie asked me, "Mama, when did Dee ever *have* any friends?"

15 She had a few. Furtive boys in pink shirts hanging about on washday after school. Nervous girls who never laughed. Impressed with her they worshiped the well-turned phrase, the cute shape, the scalding humor that erupted like bubbles in lye. She read to them.

16 When she was courting Jimmy T she didn't have much time to pay to us, but turned all her faultfinding power on him. He *flew* to marry a cheap gal from a family of ignorant flashy people. She hardly had time to recompose herself.

17 When she comes I will meet—but there they are!

18 Maggie attempts to make a dash for the house, in her shuffling way, but I stay her with my hand. "Come back here," I say. And she stops and tries to dig a well in the sand with her toe.

19 It is hard to see them clearly through the strong sun. But even the first glimpse of leg out of the car tells me it is Dee. Her feet were always neat-looking, as if God himself had shaped them with a certain style. From the other side of the car comes a short, stocky man. Hair is all over his head a foot long and hanging from his chin like a kinky mule tail. I hear Maggie suck in her breath. "Uhnnnh," is what it sounds like. Like when you see the wriggling end of a snake just in front of your foot on the road. "Uhnnnh."

20 Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings, too, gold and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go "Uhnnnh" again. It is her sister's hair. It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears.

21 "Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!" she says, coming on in that gliding way the dress makes her move. The short stocky fellow with the hair to his navel is all

grinning and he follows up with "Asalamalakim, my mother and sister!" He moves to hug Maggie but she falls back, right up against the back of my chair. I feel her trembling there and when I look up I see the perspiration falling off her chin.

22 "Don't get up," says Dee. Since I am stout it takes something of a push. You can see me trying to move a second or two before I make it. She turns, showing white heels through her sandals, and goes back to the car. Out she peeks next with a Polaroid. She stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard she snaps it and me and Maggie and the house. Then she puts the Polaroid in the back seat of the car, and comes up and kisses me on the forehead.

23 Meanwhile Asalamalakim is going through the motions with Maggie's hand. Maggie's hand is as limp as a fish, and probably as cold, despite the sweat, and she keeps trying to pull it back. It looks like Asalamalakim wants to shake hands but wants to do it fancy. Or maybe he don't know how people shake hands. Anyhow, he soon gives up on Maggie.

24 "Well," I say. "Dee."

25 "No, Mama," she says. "Not 'Dee,' Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!"

26 "What happened to 'Dee'?" I wanted to know.

27 "She's dead," Wangero said. "I couldn't bear it any longer being named after the people who oppress me."

28 "You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie," I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her "Big Dee" after Dee was born.

29 "But who was *she* named after?" asked Wangero.

30 "I guess after Grandma Dee," I said.

31 "And who was she named after?" asked Wangero.

32 "Her mother," I said, and saw Wangero was getting tired. "That's about as far back as I can trace it," I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches.

33 "Well," said Asalamalakim, "there you are."

34 "Uhnnnh," I heard Maggie say.

35 "There I was not," I said, "before 'Dicie' cropped up in our family, so why should I try to trace it that far back?"

36 He just stood there grinning, looking down on me like somebody inspecting a Model A car. Every once in a while he and Wangero sent eye signals over my head.

37 "How do you pronounce this name?" I asked.

38 "You don't have to call me by it if you don't want to," said Wangero.

39 "Why shouldn't I?" I asked. "If that's what you want us to call you, we'll call you."

40 "I know it might sound awkward at first," said Wangero.

41 "I'll get used to it," I said. "Ream it out again."

42 Well, soon we got the name out of the way. Asalamalakim had a name twice as long and three times as hard. After I tripped over it two or three times he told me to just to call him Hakim-a-barber. I wanted to ask him was he a barber, but I didn't really think he was, so I didn't ask.

43 "You must belong to those beef-cattle peoples down the road," I said. They said "Asalamalakim" when they met you, too, but they didn't shake hands. Always too busy: feeding the cattle, fixing the fences, putting up salt-lick shelters, throwing down hay. When the white folks poisoned some of the herd the men stayed up all night with rifles in their hands. I walked a mile and a half just to see the sight.

44 Hakim-a-barber said, "I accept some of their doctrines, but farming and raising cattle is not my style." (They didn't tell me, and I didn't ask, whether Wangero [Dee] had really gone and married him.)

45 We sat down to eat and right away he said he didn't eat collards and pork was unclean. Wangero, though, went on through the chitlins and corn bread, the greens and everything else. She talked a blue streak over the sweet potatoes. Everything delighted her. Even the fact that we still used the benches her daddy made for the table when we couldn't afford to buy chairs.

46 "Oh, Mama!" she cried. Then turned to Hakim-a-barber. "I never knew how lovely these benches are. You can feel the rump prints," she said, running her hands underneath her and along the bench. Then she gave a sigh and her hand closed over Grandma Dee's butter dish. "That's it!" she said. "I knew there was something I wanted to ask you if I could have." She jumped up from the table and went over in the corner where the churn stood, the milk in it clabber by now. She looked at the churn and looked at it.

47 "This churn top is what I need," she said. "Didn't Uncle Buddy whittle it out of a tree you all used to have?"

48 "Yes," I said.

49 "Uh huh," she said happily. "And I want the dasher, too."

50 "Uncle Buddy whittle that, too?" asked the barber.

51 Dee (Wangero) looked up at me.

52 "Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dash," said Maggie so low you almost couldn't hear her. "His name was Henry, but they called him Stash."

53 "Maggie's brain is like an elephant's," Wangero said, laughing. "I can use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table," she said, sliding a plate over the churn, "and I'll think of something artistic to do with the dasher."

54 When she finished wrapping the dasher the handle stuck out. I took it for a moment in my hands. You didn't even have to look close to see where hands pushing the dasher up and down to make butter had left a kind of sink in the wood. In fact, there were a lot of small sinks; you could see where thumbs and

fingers had sunk into the wood. It was beautiful light yellow wood, from a tree that grew in the yard where Big Dee and Stash had lived.

55 After dinner Dee (Wangero) went to the trunk at the foot of my bed and started rifling through it. Maggie hung back in the kitchen over the dishpan. Out came Wangero with two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the piece of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.

56 "Mama," Wangero said sweet as a bird. "Can I have these old quilts?"

57 I heard something fall in the kitchen, and a minute later the kitchen door slammed.

58 "Why don't you take one or two of the others?" I asked. "These old things was just done by me and Big Dee from some tops your grandma pieced before she died."

59 "No," said Wangero. "I don't want those. They are stitched around the borders by machine."

60 "That's make them last better," I said.

61 "That's not the point," said Wangero. "These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine!" She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them.

62 "Some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes her mother handed down to her," I said, moving up to touch the quilts. Dee (Wangero) moved back just enough so that I couldn't reach the quilts. They already belonged to her.

63 "Imagine!" she breathed again, clutching them closely to her bosom.

64 "The truth is," I said, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas."

65 She gasped like a bee had stung her.

66 "Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use."

67 "I reckon she would," I said. "God knows I been saving 'em for long enough with nobody using 'em. I hope she will!" I didn't want to bring up how I had offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style.

68 "But they're *priceless!*" she was saying now, furiously; for she has a temper. "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be in rags. Less than that!"

69 "She can always make some more," I said. "Maggie knows how to quilt."

70 Dee (Wangero) looked at me with hatred. "You just will not understand. The point is these quilts, *these* quilts!"

71 "Well," I said, stumped. "What would *you* do with them?"

72 "Hang them," she said. As if that was the only thing you *could* do with quilts.

73 Maggie by now was standing in the door. I could almost hear the sound her feet made as they scraped over each other.

74 "She can have them, Mama," she said, like somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her. "I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts."

75 I looked at her hard. She had filled her bottom lip with checkerberry snuff and it gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look. It was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught her how to quilt herself. She stood there with her scarred hands hidden in the folds of her skirt. She looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn't mad at her. This was Maggie's portion. This was the way she knew God to work.

76 When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout. I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap. Maggie just sat there on my bed with her mouth open.

77 "Take one or two of the others," I said to Dee.

78 But she turned without a word and went out to Hakim-a-barber.

79 "You just don't understand," she said, as Maggie and I came out to the car.

80 "What don't I understand?" I wanted to know.

81 "Your heritage," she said. And then she turned to Maggie, kissed her, and said, "You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it."

82 She put on some sunglasses that hid everything above the tip of her nose and her chin.

83 Maggie smiled; maybe at the sunglasses. But a real smile, not scared. After we watched the car dust settle I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of snuff. And then the two of us sat there just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed.

—1973

Lyric Poetry

We Real Cool – Gwendolyn Brooks

The Pool Players.
Seven at the Golden Shovel.

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

Harlem – Langston Hughes

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?

Still I rise – Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Haiku

Haiku by Richard Wright

1
I am nobody:
A red sinking autumn sun
Took my name away

20
The dog's violent sneeze
Fails to rouse a single fly
On his mangy back

24
The webs of spiders
Sticking to my sweaty face
In the dusty woods

93
Leaving its nest,
The sparrow sinks a second,
Then opens its wings

Praise poetry

To the Ancestors (Dogon)

Clearers of thornbush
Receive our morning greetings,
You who graded clefts in the cliffs,
Receive our morning greetings,
You who laid the cornerstone,
Receive our morning greetings,
You who placed three hearthstones,
Receive our morning greetings,
And you, women, who carried long-stemmed calabashes,
Receive our morning greetings

Bantu Praise Poem

I am the young lion!
The wild animal with pad-feet and black back!
Whose father has given up hope from the
Beginning and whose mother has wept for a long itme.
I am the fine elephant of Mathubapulu, the finest
Elephant in the Matsaakhang.

Harriet Tubman – Eloise Greenfield

Harriet Tubman didn't take no stuff
Wasn't scared of nothing neither
Didn't come in this world to be no slave
And wasn't going to stay one neither

Farewell she sang to her friends one night
She was mighty sad to leave 'em
But she ran away that dark, hot night
Ran looking for her freedom

She ran to the woods and she ran through the woods
With the slave catchers right behind her
And she kept on running till she got to the North
Where those mean men couldn't find her

Nineteen times she went back South
To get three hundred others
She ran for her freedom nineteen times
To save Black sisters and brothers
Harriet Tubman didn't take no stuff
Wasn't scared of nothing neither
Didn't come in this world to be no slave
And didn't stay one neither

Letter Writing

Dear Mama Assata,

How are you? It's been quite a while since we've communicated, but I want you to know that I think about you all the time. Whenever I feel sad or defeated, I just think about the things you've done, and it makes me feel stronger. I remember how you said, "a wall is a wall. It can be broken down." It's true. No matter what we are going through, no matter what obstacles may be in our way, they can be broken down.

Things here are moving along. We are educating our children, honoring our ancestors, and learning life's lessons from our elders. You know, the world really has a lot of beauty, especially when we are taking care of each other and treating each other right. We are going to be just fine.

Anyway, I hope this letter find you well and strong. What are you reading? What music have you been listening to? What have you been doing for fun? When you can, please drop me a line letting me know how you are.

Yours in struggle,

Literary Devices

These are by no means all *of the literary devices. I encourage you to research each of these on your own and incorporate them into your own writing.*

Alliteration – The repetition of the first letter/sound on the same line

Assonance – the repetition of vowel sounds

Couplet – Two rhyming lines in a verse

Hyperbole – exaggeration for dramatic effect

Imagery – words to create an image in the reader's mind

Metaphor – Comparison between two unlike things (without like or as)

Onomatopoeia – Words used to imitate sounds

Personification – Giving a non-living thing qualities of something that is alive

Repetition - the re-use of lines or phrases to emphasize important ideas

Rhyme Scheme - The repetition of similar sounds. It could happen at the end of a line, in the middle of a line, every other line, and so on.

Simile – comparison of two unlike things (like or as)

Stanzas - A series of lines grouped together and separated from other stanzas by an empty line. Think of it as poetry's paragraph.

Symbol – means more than itself and represents something else

Tone/Mood – How the poet shows the feeling and attitude of the poem