

Same Song

Poem by Pat Mora

Without Commercials

Poem by Alice Walker

Can changing the way you **LOOK** change who you are?



READING 3 Analyze, make inferences, and draw conclusions about theme in contemporary contexts.

Advertisers suggest that a new pair of jeans will make you more popular or that a new hair color will make you more attractive. But are those claims really true? Your appearance might affect how you look to others, but can it really change who you are? The two poems you are about to read discuss some of the ways and reasons people try to change the way they look.

QUICKWRITE Consider some of the things that people might do when they want a new appearance. This could mean getting a haircut or a new sweater. Are there times, however, when changes to someone's appearance can be harmful? Write a brief paragraph to answer that question, including examples of harmful changes.



LITERARY ANALYSIS: RECURRING THEME

The lessons learned from common life experiences are often expressed as themes in literature. When the same theme appears in more than one piece of literature, it is called a **recurring theme**.

Some themes recur (or occur over and over) for centuries. When you interpret these themes, it helps to notice the time and place in which the piece is written. The poems you are about to read were written in our time, so you will analyze them in a contemporary context. When you consider **contemporary context**, you think about how the poems reflect the way we live today. Both of the poems express a recurring theme about the importance of appearance in our society. However, each poet expresses her message in a different way. To get at the poets' shared theme, ask yourself the following questions as you read the poems:

- What is the subject being presented?
- What words tell you how the speaker feels?
- What images stand out in your mind as you read?
- What aspect of our society is the poet writing about?

READING SKILL: MAKE INFERENCES

When you **make inferences**, you make logical guesses based on two things: clues in the selection and what you already know from reading or from your own experience. As you read "Same Song" and "Without Commercials," use a chart like the one shown to record your inferences.

My Inferences	Clues from the Poems	What I Know
The girl in "Same Song" spends a lot of time getting ready each morning.	"stumbles into the bathroom at six a.m.," "curls," "strokes," "smoothes," "outlines"	It takes my sister a long time to do her hair and makeup.

Pat Mora

born 1942

Beyond Borders

Pat Mora grew up feeling as though she didn't belong to either Mexican or American culture. She was born in El Paso, Texas, near the Mexican border. She later wrote in a poem that she was "an American to Mexicans / a Mexican to Americans." Mora has said that she writes to help give Hispanic ideas and issues a larger place in American literature and because she is "fascinated by the pleasure and power of words."

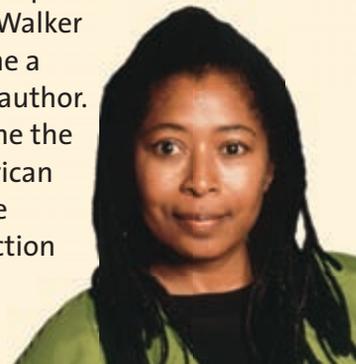


Alice Walker

born 1944

Solitary Observer

At the age of eight, Alice Walker was blinded in one eye by a shot from her brother's BB gun. The accident left horrible scars, but Walker later said that the emotions she went through during that time helped her to become a writer. Walker went on to become a highly influential author. In 1983, she became the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for her novel *The Color Purple*.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Authors Online



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Same Song

Pat Mora

While my sixteen-year-old son sleeps,
my twelve-year-old daughter
stumbles into the bathroom at six a.m.
plugs in the curling iron
5 squeezes into faded jeans
curls her hair carefully
strokes Aztec Blue shadow on her eyelids
smoothes Frosted Mauve blusher on her cheeks
outlines her mouth in Neon Pink
10 peers into the mirror, mirror on the wall
frowns at her face, her eyes, her skin,
not fair. **A**

At night this daughter
stumbles off to bed at nine
15 eyes half-shut while my son
jogs a mile in the cold dark
then lifts weights in the garage
curls and bench presses¹
expanding biceps, triceps, pectorals,
20 one-handed push-ups, one hundred sit-ups
peers into that mirror, mirror and frowns too. **B**

for Libby

A MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 10–12.

What does the speaker's daughter think is unfair?

B RECURRING THEME

Notice the phrase "mirror, mirror" in lines 10 and 21. What fairy tale does this phrase remind you of?

1. **curls and bench presses:** weight-lifting activities. Curls are done with the hands, wrists, and forearms. Bench presses involve lifting a weight with both arms while lying face-up.



WITHOUT COMMERCIALS

Alice Walker

Listen,
stop tanning yourself
and talking about
fishbelly
5 white.
The color white
is not bad at all.
There are white mornings
that bring us days.
10 Or, if you must,
tan only because
it makes you happy
to be brown,
to be able to see
15 for a summer
the whole world's
darker
face
reflected
20 in your own. **C**

Stop unfolding
your eyes. **D**
Your eyes are
beautiful.
25 Sometimes
seeing you in the street
the fold zany¹
and unexpected
I want to kiss
30 them
and usually
it is only
old
gorgeous
35 black people's eyes
I want
to kiss.

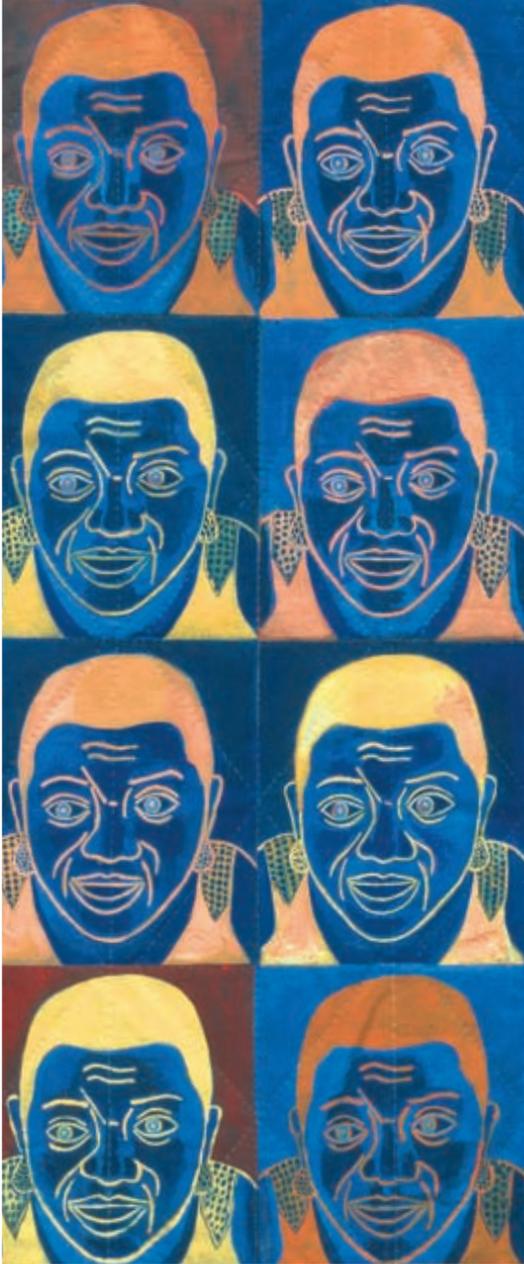
C RECURRING THEME

Consider the title and first stanza of this poem in **contemporary context**, in terms of life today. What aspect of our society is the poet writing about?

D MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 21–22. What is meant by “unfolding your eyes”?

1. **zany**: silly in an outrageous sort of way.



Detail of *Bessie's Blues: The American Collection #5* (1997), Faith Ringgold. Acrylic on canvas, painted, tie-dyed, and pieced fabric, 76 $\frac{7}{8}$ " x 79 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Robert Allerton Endowment, 2002.381, The Art Institute of Chicago. Faith Ringgold © 1997.

Stop trimming
your nose.
40 When you
diminish
your nose
your songs
become little
45 tinny, muted
and snub.
Better you should
have a nose
impertinent²
50 as a flower,
sensitive
as a root;
wise, elegant,
serious and deep.
55 A nose that
sniffs
the essence
of Earth. And knows
the message
60 of every
leaf. **E**

Stop bleaching
your skin
and talking
65 about
so much black
is not beautiful.
The color black
is not bad
70 at all.
There are black nights
that rock
us
in dreams.
75 Or, if you must,
bleach only
because it pleases you

E RECURRING THEME

What words and images in this stanza tell you how the speaker feels about the desire to change one's appearance?

2. **impertinent**: bold; beyond what is proper.

to be brown,
to be able to see
80 for as long
as you can bear it
the whole world's
lighter face
reflected
85 in your own. **F**

As for me,
I have learned
to worship
the sun
90 again.
To affirm
the adventures
of hair. **G**

For we are all
95 *splendid*
descendants
of Wilderness,
Eden:³
needing only
100 to see
each other
without
commercials
to believe.

105 Copied skillfully
as Adam.

Original

as Eve. **H**

F RECURRING THEME

According to lines 75–85,
what would be the only
good reason to bleach
one's skin?

G MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 86–93.
What do these lines tell
you about the speaker's
attitude toward her own
appearance?

H THEME

What is the poet saying
about the world in
which we live?

3. **Eden:** reference to the biblical Garden of Eden, the first home of the first humans.



READING 3 Analyze, make inferences, and draw conclusions about theme in contemporary contexts.

Comprehension

- 1. Clarify** In “Same Song,” why does the daughter “stumble off to bed at nine” with her “eyes half shut”?
- 2. Recall** To whom does the speaker compare everyone in “Without Commercials”?
- 3. Paraphrase** Rewrite lines 94–108 of “Without Commercials” in your own words. Include a statement that paraphrases the poet’s message about the world in which we live.

Literary Analysis

- 4. Make Inferences** Look again at the inferences you recorded in your chart as you read. Which were most helpful in understanding each poem?
- 5. Analyze Word Choice** Does “Without Commercials” present a mostly negative or mostly sympathetic view of people who try to change their natural appearance? Cite specific words and phrases as examples.
- 6. Analyze Recurring Theme** Use a chart like the one below to gather information about the two poems. Then state in your own words the recurring theme both poems share about appearance.

	<i>“Same Song”</i>	<i>“Without Commercials”</i>
<i>Subject Presented</i>		
<i>How Speaker Feels</i>		
<i>Images That Stand Out</i>		

Theme About Appearance:

- 7. Analyze Theme** How well do the poems reflect our society? Use examples from the poems to support your answer.

Extension and Challenge

- 8. Creative Project: Writing** Keeping the recurring theme in mind, write an extra stanza for “Without Commercials” in which the speaker addresses the children from “Same Song.” What advice would she give them?

Can changing the way you LOOK change who you are?

Do you believe the way we look makes us who we are, or does who we are determine how we look? Explain.