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*The Rose that
Grew from Concrete*
BY TUPAC SHAKUR



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The Rose That grew From Concrete

A Brief Introduction

Tupac Shakur (pronounced two-pock sha-KOOR) wrote these poems at the age of 19, before he became famous. Whether one is a fan or a cynic, this rapper, actor, and poet is a legend and a hero to many people. After examining the condition of his community, he was able to show society the realities of the world he lived in through the musical genre of “gangsta” rap. This genre, a sub division of hip-hop, is often controversial since it describes the reality of inner-city life but also promotes the ideas of homophobia, promiscuity, materialism, racism, and misogyny. Although his thought-provoking words often seem pessimistic, they ultimately voice the hope that “with the night, comes a brighter day.”

While reading his work, it is important to take the context of Shakur’s environment into consideration when discussing the material. Your students may not have been exposed to the life of crime, poverty, neglect, and violence that Tupac experienced, and many may not understand his perspective. Today, urban life is a part of the mainstream media, but it is portrayed in a glorified fashion. These displays are unrealistic, and many students may not fully understand what it means to live this type of lifestyle. This is when analyzing Shakur’s words become important. One must examine the entire context of his surroundings to fully understand his messages. By taking the time to analyze his work, students will gain valuable insight into a community that may differ greatly from their own. If your students have been exposed to this lifestyle, they might find themselves identifying closely with the author’s experiences and connect with his messages.

To gain some perspective of what urban life is truly like, you might want to examine the song “Changes.” In this song, Shakur explores the stark realities of what it is like to be an impoverished black youth in a culture that preaches equality but doesn’t practice it, to live in a world that is plagued with hunger, drugs, and violence, and to try to survive in a world that inhibits change and growth for minorities. To get insight into Shakur’s personal life, you might wish to examine the song “Dear Mama (You are Appreciated).” Note that a simple Google search will yield thousands of results for lyrics. While these songs have some profanities, you may wish to share them with the class and discuss the realities he shows.

Name: _____

Date: _____

To Our Children**Examining the Parental Role****Objective:** Thinking critically about parental figures**Activity**

The first line of the dedication says, "We must support our children in every way we can." Have you ever stopped to consider the ways a parent (or someone in that role) supports you? List the ways a parental figure supports you in each of the following aspects. You should have at least three items per aspect.

- financially
- spiritually
- emotionally
- academically

Answer the following questions:

1. How could the following people improve your quality of life?:
 - parental figure
 - teacher/administrator/counselor
 - political representative
2. How could you improve your quality of life?
3. What impact would these improvements have on your quality of life?
4. Are these improvements necessary to your survival or success? Why or why not?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Section 1: The Rose That grew From Concrete

This first section of poetry focuses on various aspects of Tupac's personal life; in fact, the first poem is autobiographical. As you read these works, pay particular attention to the following motifs:

- the use of body parts (ear, heart, eye, soul, and voice)
- the quest for success, respect, acceptance, and peace
- life in poverty
- murder and violence
- parental neglect
- feelings towards God and spirituality (e.g., "soul")

Name: _____

Date: _____

“Untitled”**Examining the Poem****Objective:** Thinking critically about the poem**Activity**

While reading the poem “Untitled,” observe how the author paints a picture of two different worlds: the one he lives in and the one he sees with his “inner eye.”

Look at the list of words that follow. Although most of these words are not used in the poem, you can associate each of them with one of the worlds Shakur describes. Next to each word, mark it with either an “R” for reality or an “I” for the imaginary.

1. ____ Jail
2. ____ Worthless
3. ____ Freedom
4. ____ Royalty
5. ____ Poverty
6. ____ Peace
7. ____ Equality
8. ____ Future
9. ____ Colorful
10. ____ Life
11. ____ Dream
12. ____ Expression
13. ____ Depression
14. ____ Darkness
15. ____ Death
16. ____ War
17. ____ Nightmare
18. ____ Fear
19. ____ Blindness

Next, give the poem a title that might convey the author's ideas best.

Name: _____

Date: _____

“What Is It That I Search 4”**Examining Senses****Objective:** Relying on the sense of touch to “see”**Activity**

In the poem, Shakur says that he doesn't know what he is searching for; therefore, he must search blindly. Have you ever tried to search for something in the dark? You might be able to find your way around by feeling for corners, furniture, and other objects. Since you cannot see, you are relying on touch to distinguish these objects. This skill would be invaluable if you were blind.

Day Before:

For the activity tomorrow, bring in a small object from home that might be hard to identify based on touch alone. Some examples include, but are by no means limited to, the following:

- battery
- plastic figurine
- eraser
- building block
- board game piece
- candy/gum
- hairclip
- lip gloss/makeup
- candle
- stopwatch
- teabag
- button
- whiteout

Day of Activity:

Divide yourselves into small groups and place your items from home into the bag. Once the bags have been switched, take turns reaching into the bag and guessing an object. As you touch the object, tell the group members what the object feels like. You might want to pay particular attention to the weight, size, and texture of the object.

Name: _____

Date: _____

“From First Glance”**Creative Dialogue****Objective:** Creating pickup lines and responses**Activity**

Shakur uses various tones as he writes to and about different women. However, this poem seems to be different from the others because he doesn't write anything significant about Michelle or their relationship. Since this short poem is titled “From First Glance,” we can assume that he has just met this woman and that he is interested in starting a relationship with her. Notice that the final line is a challenging statement, and he ultimately expects to be victorious. Based on these characteristics, it seems as though the poem could be interpreted as more of a long pickup line.

A pickup line is a corny introduction that people use when they're trying to meet someone they're attracted to. Most of us have heard pickup lines in movies, on television, or from strangers when we're out in public. A popular one from the past (when people used payphones regularly) was:

Person 1: “Excuse me, do you have a quarter?”

Person 2: “Why?”

Person 3: “Because my mother told me to call her when I fell in love.”

Write down at least ten pickup lines—these can be ones you've heard previously or ones you create on your own. Then, write down a response for each. If your pickup lines and the responses include any slang, include a brief definition. Be sure to keep your work appropriate for the classroom.