

English 96

Group Discussion Questions for Angelou's "Graduation"

Instructions: Each group will be responsible for discussing and answering all of the questions. One person in the group should be responsible for writing down the group's responses to the questions. Other members in the group, however, will find it helpful to take their own notes, since the responses to these questions will help you write your essay on Angelou's "Graduation."

1. The first two paragraphs contrast the black school in Stamps, Arkansas, in 1940 with the white school. What picture is painted and how does this prepare us for what happens during the graduation ceremony?
2. How would you define the attitude of the black community toward graduation? Pick out details to illustrate. Why do you think they have such an attitude?
3. Why does Marguerite (the narrator) give so many details about clothes (starting with paragraph 6)?
4. What does Marguerite spend so much time discussing the preparations for graduation? How would you characterize her attitude towards graduation before the event itself (prior to paragraph 20)?
5. Who is Mr. Edward Donleavy? What effect does his speech have on the graduates? Why does it have this effect?
6. How does Marguerite respond to Donleavy's speech (see paragraphs 44-46 especially)? Does her response make sense to you?
7. How did Henry Reed lift the mood of the audience? What does Marguerite mean when she calls the song "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" the "Negro national anthem"? (If you are not familiar with "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" you might try looking it up online.)