Poetry Group B:

“Sympathy” by Paul Dunbar

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!   
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;   
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,   
And the river flows like a stream of glass;   
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,   
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals--   
I know what the caged bird feels!  
  
I know why the caged bird beats his wing   
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;   
For he must fly back to his perch and cling   
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;   
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars   
And they pulse again with a keener sting--   
I know why he beats his wing!  
  
I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,   
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,--   
When he beats his bars and he would be free;   
It is not a carol of joy or glee,   
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,   
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings--   
I know why the caged bird sings!

“We Wear the Mask” by Paul Dunbar

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,--  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties.  
  
Why should the world be overwise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.  
  
We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
We wear the mask!

“I Look at the World” by Langston Hughes

I look at the world

From awakening eyes in a black face—

And this is what I see:

This fenced-off narrow space

Assigned to me.

I look then at the silly walls

Through dark eyes in a dark face—

And this is what I know:

That all these walls oppression builds

Will have to go!

I look at my own body

With eyes no longer blind—

And I see that my own hands can make

The world that's in my mind.

Then let us hurry, comrades,

The road to find.

“I, Too” by Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

But I laugh,

And eat well,

And grow strong.

Tomorrow,

I’ll be at the table

When company comes.

Nobody’ll dare

Say to me,

“Eat in the kitchen,”

Then.

Besides,

They’ll see how beautiful I am

And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

“Forgive My Guilt” by Robert Tristram Coffin

Not always sure what things called sins may be,   
I am sure of one sin I have done.   
It was years ago, and I was a boy,   
I lay in the frostflowers with a gun,   
The air ran blue as the flowers, I held my breath,   
Two birds on golden legs slim as dream things   
Ran like quicksilver on the golden sand,   
My gun went off, they ran with broken wings   
Into the sea, I ran to fetch them in,   
But they swam with their heads high out to sea,   
They cried like two sorrowful high flutes,   
With jagged ivory bones where wings should be.   
  
For days I heard them when I walked that headland   
Crying out to their kind in the blue,   
The other plovers were going over south   
On silver wings leaving these broken two.   
The cries went out one day; but I still hear them   
Over all the sounds of sorrow in war or peace   
I ever have heard, time cannot drown them,   
Those slender flutes of sorrow never cease.   
Two airy things forever denied the air!   
I never knew how their lives at last were spilt,   
But I have hoped for years all that is wild,   
Airy, and beautiful will forgive my guilt.

“If” by Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too:  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;  
  
If you can dream---and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think---and not make thoughts your aim,  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same:.  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build'em up with worn-out tools;  
  
If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,  
And never breathe a word about your loss:  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"  
  
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings---nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much:  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And---which is more---you'll be a Man, my son!