

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Analyzing Poetry

Below is Joyce Sidman's poem "Song of Bravery." (We explain a few allusions in the poem.) Read the poem a few times. Then answer the questions on the next few pages. This activity is meant to be completed with partners, in groups, or as a class.

## Song of Bravery by Joyce Sidman

"Break a leg" is something actors say to each other before going onstage. It means "good luck."

1 This one's not a sure thing.  
I'm not bound to win.  
3 I don't think I'll ace it this time.  
I won't break a leg,  
5 make my own luck,  
or reach the stars.

7 The sun is not shining on me today.  
The force is not strong.  
9 Before the day is out,  
I'll taste the grit of dust.

In the Star Wars movies, the Force is a mysterious spiritual energy field. Certain characters can use its power and gain extraordinary abilities. It is said that "the force is strong" with these characters.

11 Maybe I didn't do all I could.  
Or maybe I did  
13 but there were others who did more.  
Maybe I'll never know.

In ancient Rome, men sometimes fought with wild animals, including lions, for the entertainment of crowds. Some of these men were trained, professional fighters armed with weapons. Others were thrown into the ring with wild animals as punishment for a crime. (This barbaric practice was ended in the 4th century.)

15 But here I go—  
bones clicking quietly together,  
17 blood flowing dutifully  
from heart to hands and back again—  
19 here I go, stepping out  
through the door  
21 of my own shadow:  
into the glare of the arena  
23 to face the lions.

Go to  
Scope Online  
to hear this poem  
read aloud.

**Directions:** Work with your partner or group to answer the following questions. Note: To keep things simple, we use the pronouns *her* and *she* to refer to the speaker of the poem. But the speaker is not necessarily female.

**1** Consider the following sayings:

"It's a sure thing."

"You're bound to win."

"Aced it!"

"Break a leg."

"Make your own luck."

"Reach for the stars."

**a.** What do all of these sayings have in common (besides being referred to in the first stanza of the poem)?

**b.** How does the poet turn these familiar expressions around in the first stanza?

**2** In line 7, the speaker says, "The sun is not shining on me today." What does she mean?

**3** In lines 9-10, the speaker says, "Before the day is out, I'll taste the grit of dust." Do you think she is literally expecting to get dirt in her mouth? If not, what does she mean?

**4** The first two stanzas are written in present and future tense: The speaker talks about how she is feeling in the moment and what she expects to happen.

**a.** What verb tense or tenses does the speaker use in the third stanza—past, present, future, or a combination?

**b.** What is the speaker talking about in this stanza?

**5** In lines 15-18, the speaker talks about her body: her "bones clicking quietly together,/blood flowing dutifully/from heart to hands and back again." Why do you think the poet chose to include these lines? What do they help you understand about how the speaker is feeling?

**6** What do you think the speaker means in lines 19-21 when she says that she steps out through the door of her own shadow?

**7** As explained in the annotation on page 1 of this activity, the last two lines of the poem are an allusion to a practice from ancient Roman times. Do you think this poem is literally about fighting lions in front of a crowd? Why or why not?

- 8** The poem is *not* literally about fighting lions, yet the speaker never reveals what the task ahead of her is. Why might the poet have made this choice?

- 9** Consider the poem's title.

**a.** In your own words, what does it mean to be brave? Do you think it requires more bravery to do something that you feel confident about or something that you do not feel confident about?

**b.** Do you think the title "Song of Bravery" fits this poem? Why or why not?

- 10** Take a moment to study the illustration on page 32 of your issue of *Scope*. What do you notice? How do the different elements of the illustration connect to the poem?