

Analyzing Poetry: “Characters” by Jason Reynolds



Directions: Read the poem as well as the “Meet the Poet” interview. Then answer the questions on the slides that follow.

Click here to
listen to Jason
Reynolds read
his poem.

1. Did reading what Jason Reynolds says about his poem surprise you or make you understand the poem in a different way?

2. In his answer to the first question in “Meet the Poet,” Reynolds talks about how the title of his poem has a double meaning. In your own words, explain what this double meaning is.

3. Reynolds says he is using the word *characters* “to discuss social media and how all of us pretend to be people that we are not.” Do you agree that on social media, we all pretend to be people we are not? Why or why not?

4. What does Reynolds mean when he refers to the “weight” of words?

5. Why would speaking in haiku force us to consider the weight of each word?

What is a haiku?

A haiku is a poem with three lines that follows the 5/7/5 rule: There are five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second line, and five syllables in the third line. Here's how the syllables break down in "Characters":

1 2 3 4 5
| i | wish | more | people

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
| spoke | in | haiku; | considered |

1 2 3 4 5
| the | weight | of | each | word |

6. Do you think Reynolds means people should *literally* speak in haiku—in three-line poems that follow the 5/7/5 rule? Explain.

7. Reynolds says that the idea for this poem came from social media. Do you think the poem has a meaning that goes beyond social media? Explain.

Take a moment to look at the illustration that artist Grace Heejung Kim created to go with the poem. Then respond to the questions below and on the next page.

8. Describe what is going on in the illustration.

9. Describe the colors in the illustration.

10. What are some words you would use to describe the mood of the illustration?

11. Do you think the illustration goes well with the poem? Explain why or why not.